**California Department of Education
Focused Monitoring Process:**

A Summative Review for Year Three

Final Deliverable

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Tables:

Figures:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this Focused Monitoring Process (FMP) evaluation is to present summative data for the third year of the process and implementation of this statewide reform effort. The evaluation focuses on three major areas: (1) the effect FMP on district participants and practices; (2) factors that influence the success of FMP; and (3) district efforts to sustain improvements.

Fifteen California school districts participated in this evaluation, and both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed to portray a comprehensive portrait of the FMP and implementation in *Year Three*. These methods included structured phone interviews and a survey.

In-depth telephone interviews were conducted to explain specific district issues regarding the Focused Monitoring Process: (1) to gain a better understanding of team members' roles in FMP; and (2) to gather information regarding the general successes and challenges in FMP implementation. For this final summative evaluation, an attempt was made to interview each district FM coordinator. A total of 13 out of 15 district administrators were interviewed, many of who had participated in the previous evaluations. Three major components were addressed in the interview: (1) background information regarding the role, experience and duties of the interviewee for FMP; (2) information regarding issues of the team/planning process (e.g., team meetings, team level of effort, goals and accomplishments, and compliance reviews); and (3) other aspects of FMP (evaluation of leadership, the effectiveness of the process, availability and quality of resources, as well as issues of accountability and sustaining improvements).

The *Survey for Focused Monitoring District Team Members* was adapted from the first year survey to obtain information regarding the process and implementation of Focused Monitoring, as well as to get a sense of progress being made in the district from varying perspectives. There were three sections of the survey: (1) team member background information; (2) open-ended questions; (3) Likert-scale survey questions addressing seven areas related to FMP (leadership training, team process, planning process, verification review, FM consultants and resources, integration of reform efforts, and accountability and sustainability). A separate survey was sent to the district coordinator to obtain information about district demographics (e.g., size, community, etc.); this information was subsequently used to analyze the survey

scales according to defined groups. Subsequently, five major component scales were developed that provided information on the various aspects of Focused Monitoring: (1) *team effectiveness and understanding* (i.e., perceptions of team building, effectiveness, and participation); (2) *improvement efforts* (e.g., perceptions of improvements based on data that were used to address the KPIs, achieving district-determined goals, and improvements in compliance via the verification review); (3) *state consultant services* (i.e. perceptions of the role of the state consultant in the FM process); (4) *accountability* (e.g., perceptions of responsibility in implementing and monitoring improvement efforts); and (5) *sustainability* (e.g., perceptions of the ability to sustain the FMP and progress in the KPIs). A total of 90 surveys from 13 of the 15 school district were included in the data analyses.

Results from the summative survey and interview analyses were positive; however, many FM team members and district administrators also discussed challenges that affected efforts to improve student outcome or their ability to sustain the improvements that had been made. Overall, the FM team participants perceived a high level of success with respect to improving student outcomes and achieving compliance through the verification review. In order to achieve their goals, many programmatic and curricular changes, as well as behavioral changes on the part of district personnel, were made. Teachers received training on various programs, including literacy and inclusion models. School districts hired qualified teachers in order to have the personnel who would be able to understand the needs of the district and aid in making these structural and systemic changes. Also, participants perceived a high level of teamwork and relationship building, through leadership institutes and outside consultants, which enabled them to work together toward their goals. There was a sense that the state consultants were helpful and an integral part in implementing the districts' plans through disseminating information and resources. Participants believed themselves as an individual, site, and district to be responsible for the educational outcomes of their students as well as improving compliance with respect to the provision of services to special education students. Finally, participants perceived a level of commitment to continuing to use the FMP approach to improving student outcome and compliance. This commitment includes monitoring activities that have already demonstrated improvement so that success can be maintained as well as to continue to evaluate and meet the needs of their students. Statements from the open-ended survey questions also suggested the continuation of professional development activities in order for district staff to keep

up with the latest innovations and best practices in education. Recommendations regarding the ability to sustain improvement efforts made through FMP are made.

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION FOCUSED MONITORING

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE EVALUATION:

A SUMMATIVE REVIEW FOR YEAR THREE

Valeria Chow and Judy Miyoshi

Introduction

The state of California has recognized that students with disabilities must be expected to meet high standards as the general education population and is strongly committed to improving the educational outcomes of students with disabilities. In the past, there was no systematic manner to determine the effectiveness of special education programs in the state and how they linked to student outcomes and learning. Moreover, compliance was not necessarily linked to student outcomes. In response to this lack of evidence, the California Department of Education's (CDE) Special Education Division (SED) developed a system to monitor the practices within school districts that relate to effective learning and to ensure and enforce protections guaranteed under the law to students with disabilities and their families (Parker, 2000). This system, Focused Monitoring Process (FMP), provides a three-year grant for school districts across California to use in transforming special education programs that target improvement as well as increase compliance with special education regulations. Through a process of capacity building and team development at the district level, and ongoing training of innovative practices (curricular and systemic) at the site level, the FMP expects to improve the outcome and provision of services to special education students.

The UCLA Center for the Study of Evaluation (CSE) and its National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) has conducting a comprehensive evaluation of the implementation and impact of Focused Monitoring in participating California districts. This evaluation report presents findings from these districts for the third year (2001-2002) of the reform effort, and examines the implementation process, progress in student outcomes and service delivery, and factors that affect this program's effectiveness.

Goals of the Focused Monitoring Process Program

As stated above, there was little evidence to connect special education programs with measurable learning progress in students with disabilities. Furthermore, increasing litigation and due process hearings led to the realization that there were serious problems with service delivery to these students. Legislative efforts calling for increasing accountability and high standards for all students also impacted the development of the FMP program.

The FMP was developed by the CDE/SED and professionals in the field to hold districts accountable for the outcomes of their students receiving special education by focusing on the specific needs of these students. Districts were to work on specific goals that would improve student outcomes through data-based inquiry and program implementation. These goals are tied to high standards and measured by key performance indicators (KPIs). The FMP intends to promote in districts the use of research-based best practices to support student learning.

Finally, understanding that compliance with special education laws will ensure that appropriate services are being provided to students with disabilities, the FMP includes a component for districts to participate in an intensive review of student records in order to determine those areas, if any, in which district may be systemically non-compliant and to redress those areas through the implementation of corrective actions.

Description of the Participating Districts in this Evaluation

As with the *Year Two* report, the focus of this evaluation is on the Facilitated Review districts. The Facilitated Review is a three-year partnership between a school district and the CDE that entails an intense process for establishing systemic change through leadership development and capacity building, major improvements in student performance and compliance with special education laws and procedures. Specifically, the Facilitated Review involves active collaboration between state SED consultants and district leadership teams that plan for and support organizational change and improved performance results. This report reflects the third year of the Facilitated Review districts involvement in FMP program. Fifteen school districts are represented in this evaluation report.

Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of this FMP evaluation report is to present findings for *Year Three* of the evaluation. The evaluation examines the Focused Monitoring teams' reaction to the FMP, perceived effectiveness of FMP components, and progress in improving the KPIs and attaining compliance with state and federal special education regulations. The findings gathered in *Year Three* will help illuminate the perceptions, intended improvements, and sustainability concerns of the FMP program.

Year Three Evaluation Questions

Three basic questions guide the focus of this *Year Three* evaluation:

- What have been the effects of Focused Monitoring on district participants and district practices for special education students?

- What factors influenced the success of Focused Monitoring during *Year Three*?

- Will Focused Monitoring efforts be sustained?

In order to address these questions, a mixed methodology was used. Specifically, interviews were conducted with district administrators, to get an in depth understanding of the FMP program in participating districts. Furthermore, a summative survey was distributed with the idea that each member of the FMP team provides his/her opinions and perceptions of the FMP program.

The following sections in this evaluation report include: an evaluation framework, evaluation results, and summary with recommendations. The evaluation framework includes information on the participants, measures, and data analyses used for these measures. This section is followed by the evaluation results section that includes analyses of overall trends in the state using qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The evaluation report concludes with a summary of the results and recommendations.

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The framework for this study was based on a multiple method strategy using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. This study design was used to understand and depict perspectives of the Focused Monitoring (FM) leadership team members and the state consultants assigned to work with the districts. The data collection strategies included a telephone interview with a designee appointed by each district's superintendent (usually the district special education administrator) and a survey for FM team members. Table 1 represents the data sources for each evaluation question (component). The focus of the *Year Three* evaluation included a summative review of the FMP in the participating districts.

Table 1

Data Sources for the Evaluation Questions

Evaluation Questions	District Administrator Interview	Survey
What have been the effects of Focused Monitoring on district participants and district practices for special education students?	X	X
What factors influenced the success of Focused Monitoring?	X	X
Will Focused Monitoring efforts be sustained?	X	X

Participants

District Administrator Interview

Eight of the 10 district administrators who participated in the previous year's interview (*Year Two*: 2000-2001) also participated in this year's interview[1]. An additional 4 district administrators from the remaining five districts were recruited to participate.[2] This addition brought the total number of interview participants to 13 coordinators. These district administrators came from districts that represented different regions across California, various-sized school district (based on student

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[1] One district administrator who participated in the previous years declined to participate in the interview for *Year Three* based on the rationale that very little FMP program activity was occurring in the district. A new district coordinator replaced one of the interviewees from *Year Two*.

[2] Of the five districts recruited, one district administrator declined participation in the interview.

population), and various special population characteristics (CalWORKS, free/reduced-price meals, and English Language Learners). On average, the district administrators had 4.5 years experience in their current position (typically, Special Education Director) and had been the coordinator for the FMP program since its inception in their districts (only three coordinators were in their first year in that role).

Survey for District Focused Monitoring Team Members

FM district coordinators reported a range from three to 50 members on their FM leadership team during the telephone interview. Based on this reporting, the total of potential survey participants was 254. Therefore, 20 surveys were sent to each district in order to allow for the maximum number of participants (with the exception of one district whose coordinator reported 50 members). A total of 91 surveys were returned; however one survey did not contain any responses except for the background information. Therefore, that survey was not included with the rest of the surveys for analysis bringing the total number of surveys to 90 (a response rate of 35%). Thirteen out of 15 districts participated. Table 2 presents the response rate per district that participated in the survey.

Table 2

Frequency and Proportion of Returned Surveys and Team Membership by District

District	Surveys returned	Total team membership	Proportion
02	4	6	.67
04	0	15	0
05	8	28	.29
06	2	3	.67
07	14	50	.28
08	9	20	.45
09	3	20	.15
10	6	20	.30
11	4	12	.33
12	2	12	.17
13	0	9	0
14	7	15	.47
16	7	12	.58
17	18	20	.90
19	6	15	.40

The participants for each district included superintendents and assistant superintendents, special and general education teachers, special education administrators and principals, and a wide variety of other school and district personnel.

Instrumentation

District Administrator Interview

The Administrator Interview consisted of 28 free response questions and various probes for each of the questions. The questions were designed to address three objectives: (1) to understand the activities related to Focused Monitoring (including the addressing of the KPIs) that have been implemented; (2) to gather information on the general successes and barriers in the implementation of Focused Monitoring; and (3) to examine issues of sustainability after Year Three. Table 3 depicts the main components in the District Administrator Interview.

Table 3

Administrator Interview: Main Components and Definitions

Interview section	Definition
Background Information	The questions in this section included queries about district position(s) and experience, role and duties in the FMP, and past special education involvement.
Focused Monitoring Training	Included questions about training regarding systemic change within the district, and other training related to Focused Monitoring or implementation of curriculum.
Team Effectiveness and Understanding	Included questions about the team process for Focused Monitoring such as probes on team meeting, team composition, team level of effort.
	Included question about the leadership roles as they relate to the FM implementation process and types of leadership training that is offered in the district.
	Included questions about perceptions of building administrator's (e.g., principal) and teachers' attitude and receptiveness to the FMP.
Use of Data	Included questions about the types of data that were used to make decisions, how data was understood, and how KPIs were used to determine improvement.
Planning and Goals	Included questions about goals and activity accomplishments, specifically with respect to improvements in KPIs.
Verification Review	Included questions about the corrective actions that were developed and implemented as a result of the verification review, and comparisons of the verification review and pre-existing CCR process.
State Consultant Services	Included questions about the quality and types of services received by state consultants and technical assistants.
Resources	Included questions regarding the availability and access to state and district resources.
Reflections on the Focused Monitoring Process	Included question about potential effects, barriers and successes in the implementation process, and issues of sustainability of improvement.

The following are sample Administrator Interview questions (see Appendix A for the Administrator Interview Protocol):

In this final year of the FMP pilot study, describe the types of training (new or ongoing), if any, that you perceive as vital for the FM leadership team to continue its work and progress.

How has your role in FM evolved since Focused Monitoring began?

What level of contact with the state consultant do you foresee as being necessary to continue the district's progress after Year 3 (pilot project) has ended?

What have you and the team learned from the FMP that will have a lasting impact on district practices (once the pilot program ends)?

FM coordinators were contacted to schedule an appointment for the interview ensuring the confidentiality of their participation. The interviewees were sent consent forms prior to conducting the interview. At the time of the interview, the interviewer set up the recording equipment in a confidential office space to protect the privacy of interviews that lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Interviews were conducted between February and April 2002.

Survey for Focused Monitoring District Team Members

A survey consisting of 52 questions was designed to obtain information about the respondent and the respondent's school district as well as the respondent's perceptions of the FMP. The survey was broken into three sections: background information, open-ended questions, and closed-ended questions requiring a Likert-type scale response. To capture pertinent information across domains, the closed-ended questions were divided into seven categories: *Leadership Training, Team Process, Planning Process, Verification Review, FM Consultants and Resources, Integration of Reform Efforts, and Accountability and Sustainability* (see Table 4).

Table 4

Survey Components and Definitions

Survey section	Definition
Background Information	Respondents' work experience
Open-ended Questions	Allows for free response on successes, challenges and future issues of the FMP program
Leadership Training	Impact of training on team process
Team Process	Understanding and feedback on the FM team group process
The Planning Process	Respondents use and utility of the Key Performance Indicator data
Verification Review	Activities regarding the verifying of student record files for compliance with IDEA 1997 and state laws
FM Consultant(s) and Resources	The services that the consultant gave during FMP. The availability of resources (money, supplies, materials, personnel, etc.) in the district and state
Integration of Reform Efforts	The ability and usefulness of FM in making changes within the district regarding special education service delivery
Accountability and Sustainability	The people who are accountable for FM implementation and sustainability in the district as FM comes to an end

As noted above, Likert scale and open-ended questions were used to address programmatic issues. The Likert Scale consisted of the following scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree. "Don't Know" and "Too Early To Tell" were two other response options provided for Likert Scale questions. Sample survey questions are provided below (See Appendix B for the Focused Monitoring Survey for District Administrators):

My district could benefit from more training in the area of team/capacity building.

The planing process in my district is effective.

Overall, the services provided by the CDE FM consultant are useful for the implementation of FM.

There is increased communication between the school sites and the district administration as a result of FM.

A few questions on the survey were open-ended questions and included such questions as the following:

Describe the factors that have enabled your team to be successful.

Describe challenges related to FM activities that your team has encountered.

A special, short district demographics survey also was attached to the *Survey for Focused Monitoring District Team Members* for the district FM coordinator only. This survey intended to gather information regarding district demographics, the composition of the FM team, and the district's KPI focus (see Appendix C).

The participants were provided four weeks to complete and return the surveys.

Data Analysis

Data analysis methodology followed commonly used procedures for handling qualitative and quantitative measures, including structured interviews, and a district-wide FM team survey.

District Administrator Interview

The FM administrator interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. Several domains and themes were developed based on initial readings of interview responses. Reliability was established between two researchers who independently coded 20% of the interviews using the following formula: number of agreements/ number of agreements + number of disagreements. Reliability was calculated to be .82. Once reliability was attained, all interview transcripts were then coded for domains and themes that occurred throughout each interview. The domains included *Leadership, Impact on Practice, State Consultant Services, Resources, Training, FM Team Process,* and *Reflections on the FMP*. Several themes within the domains were also coded and are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Interview Domains, Themes, and Definitions

Domain	Theme	Definition
Leadership	Superintendent and Administrator Involvement	Involvement of the superintendent or principal in FMP
	Transitions in Leadership	Changes in leadership and the effect on FMP
Impact on Practice	Improvement in Student Performance/Instruction Delivery	Improvements in district KPIs
	Improved Compliance/Service Delivery	Improvements in Verification Review and corrective actions
	Buy-In	District staff who have become involved in FMP efforts
State Consultant Services	Perceptions of Service and Commitment	Positive and negative comments regarding service of state consultant
	Positive Perceptions of Knowledge	Level of knowledge of state consultant regarding programs, resources, etc.
Resources	Human Resources	People and staff who have been beneficial to functioning of FMP
	Model Sites	Model school or district sites and their effect on FMP implementation
	Future Needs	Resource needs of districts in order to continue with FMP
Training	Leadership Training	Training related to FMP
	Professional Development	Professional development activities
FM Team Process	Team-building	The FMP team and its ability to move agendas forward
	District & Site Collaboration	Collaboration, particularly between district and site

Table 5 (continued)

Domain	Theme	Definition
Reflections on the FMP	Successes	Elements that enabled FMP to be successful
	Challenges	Elements that held back FMP momentum
	Issues of Sustainability	Concern about district's ability to sustain efforts
	Lasting Impact on Practices	Practices that will remain due to FMP implementation

The results of the district administrator interview analysis are included with the quantitative analysis from the survey addressing each evaluation question.

Survey for Focused Monitoring District Team Members

The survey consisted of a total of 52 questions. Six questions were open-ended and required written responses. A total of 46 questions were used in the quantitative analysis, comprised of six questions related to participant background and 40 reflecting specific areas of inquiry. These latter items were grouped conceptually into five scales, and weighted averages computed (see Table 6; items within each scale is displayed in Appendix D). The high reliability (alpha) coefficients observed in the scales suggest their tenability.

Table 6

Survey Scales, Definitions, and Reliability

Scale	Definition	Survey item #	Reliability
Team Effectiveness	Team building, effectiveness, and participation	11-20, 39, 41, 44-45	$\alpha = .87$
Improvement Efforts	Improvements in Key Performance Indicators (KPI), compliance, or other student improvement data	21-31, 37,38, 40, 42-43	$\alpha = .89$
State Consultant Services	The role of the State Consultant Services in the process and in the districts	32-35	$\alpha = .95$
Accountability	Participants' impressions of accountability	46-49	$\alpha = .86$
Sustainability	Impressions of district's ability to sustain progress and positive change.	36, 50-52	$\alpha = .87$

Various analyses were conducted with district demographic variables (type of position, experience, community type, district size, and district type) on the following scales: *Team Effectiveness, Improvement Efforts, State Consultant Services, Accountability,* and *Sustainbility.* Demographic variables were recoded to form comparison groups (see Table 8).

Table 7

Recoding of Demographic Variables

Variable	Recoded groups	Variable	Recoded groups
Represented positions	Special Education	School community	Rural
	Non-Special Education		Suburban
			Urban
Level of experience in district	Low (0-5 years)		
	High (6 + years)	School size	Small (0-500 teachers)
			Large (5001 + teachers)
Level of experience in position	Novice (0-5 years)		
	Experienced (6 + years)	School district type	Unified School District
			Elementary School District
			High School District

The analyses included *t*-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA). In general, participants tended to agree with the statements that were included within each of the scales (per the 4-point Likert scale; 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree) resulting in averages between 2.58 and 3.49. No significant differences resulted between groups on each of the recoded demographic variables. Therefore, the results for each demographic variable are not discussed here; however, descriptive data are presented in Appendix E.

To address the evaluation questions, averages were calculated for each of the scales. In order to calculate the means for each scale, first averages were computed for each district and then multiplied by the weight, or proportion of returned surveys to the

total number of potential participants (according to the district coordinator; refer back to Table 2) resulting in 13 district means for a scale (e.g., Team Effectiveness). The average of these 13 means was computed to determine the weighted mean for each scale. [3]

EVALUATION RESULTS

Survey Demographic Analysis

The participants for each district represented various mixes of district personnel including superintendents and assistant superintendents, special and general education teachers, special education administrators and principals. Table 7 shows the number of respondents by district position, as reported on the *Survey for Focused Monitoring Team Members* for *Year Three* of the evaluation.

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[3] Weighted means are used to equalize the number of respondents in each district, especially when the number of respondents per district is different (e.g., 8 respondents from District A and 2 respondents from District B).

Table 8

Frequency of Respondents by District Position

Focused Monitoring Team by District Position	Year Three
General Education Teacher	8 (8.9)
Special Education Teacher	20 (22.2)
Building Administrators (i.e., Principal)	11 (12.2)
Superintendent	1 (1.1)
Assistant Superintendent	3 (3.3)
Special Education Director	9 (10)
SELPA Representative	1 (1.1)
Speech Pathologist	2 (2.2)
Classroom Aide	1 (1.1)
Program Specialist/Coordinator	2 (2.2)
School Psychologist	5 (5.6)
Parent	1 (1.1)
CDE Consultant	1 (1.1)
Other	16 (17.8)
Total	90 (100)

One of the returned surveys, with the exception of participant background information, did not contain responses to any of the questions and was therefore eliminated from analyses. Other surveys that were incomplete (all less than 10 questions unanswered) were treated as missing data. The total number of surveys included in the analysis was 90.

The following section, Overall District Trends, presents the interview and survey data for each of the evaluation questions for *Year Three*: (1) What have been the effects of Focused Monitoring on district participants and district practices for special education students? (2) Which factors influenced the success of Focused Monitoring for *Year Three*? (3) Will Focused Monitoring Efforts be sustained?

Overall District Trends

FMP Program Operations

This section of the report describes general trends in the FMP program implementation in participating school districts. During the first year of FMP (1999-2000), districts established leadership teams comprised of multidisciplinary personnel, including special educators, general educators, district administration, and school site personnel. Teams varied in size, from three to more than 20 people in some sites. These teams held meetings throughout the year to discuss various topics including professional development, student improvement, and program development and implementation. The number of meetings each team conducted during an academic year was determined by team and district necessity.

Districts were provided with various resources through participation in Focused Monitoring. Also, it made them more aware of resources that could help in efforts to improve student outcomes. Several themes that reflected discussions from the district coordinator interviews about these resources emerged in the analyses including human resources, model sites, and funding.

Human resources. A few district administrators mentioned that the best resources were the people who worked in the districts. These people included the district leadership team as well as teachers at the school sites. The various experiences and areas of expertise that these people brought to FMP were highly valued.

> I think our best resource has been each other, from different areas and what we bring to the table. Being able to dialogue and look at different funding sources and see how we can each dip into the pot to provide that. The leadership team has been critical in addressing issues of resources and looking at what we have.

> We have the best resources in the world, and that's individuals who care. That's my resource.

More than half of the district coordinators reported on the importance of getting support from key district administrators, in particular the assistant superintendents and specialists. A couple of district coordinators reflected on this support, and how it facilitated the purchase of materials, the mandatory attendance by personnel at a meeting or training, or provided the necessary information to improve student outcomes for special education students.

I think the support we've gotten from the assistant superintendent, the support we've gotten from curriculum and instruction, the support we've gotten from curriculum specialists, have helped us. When we've had testing issues, the testing – the director of testing has come to the Focused Monitoring meetings, and gone over testing information. We have curriculum issues, the appropriate curriculum person would come to the meeting. Especially when we're discussing literacy, and what type of programs we should purchase. We had a lot of support from curriculum and staff development.

The collaboration between the assistant superintendent and the personnel director. They were willing to give us all the information we needed for the general ed data. From the assessment center, from the state and federal projects person, saying, "What do you need? I'll sit down with you and work at it. What should we be doing?" And then making them understand that you just don't look at data as a district, you also look at your special ed data to see if those kids are improving as well. And what is it that we need to do to get them to improve as well? Because they're taking that SAT9 and bringing your scores down, too.

Model sites. At the leadership institutes, several district or school sites were invited to participate as "model" sites. Several district coordinators mentioned that these model sites gave their FM district personnel a glimpse into practices that are working at other school sites to achieve improved student outcomes.

Our next phase of that is that we've made contact with some other high schools going through a similar process that are model schools and now we're going to be doing some visitations and have questions to help us with our process.

I can think of a few that there are a big focus and thrust on the collaborative model. The teachers and the three schools in [District X] have been able to partake of that. They have been doing some staff development on the six trades of writing. The teachers in the three schools and the [District X] schools are going to participate in that. The district is promoting the reading program language, for high risk and special education kids. There is going to be training provided for that. Which are great and no cost for us. There are lots of things. There is a three-day leadership collaborative institute conference and the secondary literacy conference she talked about at our last meeting. She told the schools that they could use some of their Focused Monitoring money to go to those, if they wanted to and chose to spend it that way.

One FM district coordinator described the positive effects of participating as a model site in the leadership institute:

We did quite a few different models of collaboration with special ed and general ed, which is really unique for a high school district. We talked to districts all over the state and we're one

of the forerunners. A lot of them do it really easily in the elementary and some in the middle, but his is a high school… I think all of the districts we've talked to have really enjoyed the experience. We've had some lasting relationships. We have a couple of close people now that we know from [School Site X], the leader in collaboration for years. They're picking our brain and we're picking their brain for problem areas and pitfalls.

Funding. All of the district coordinators reported that grant funding was one of the most important components of the FMP. Many of the district coordinators reported that the money served as an incentive for districts to apply to the FMP program. One district coordinator reported that through participation in the FMP, their district was exposed to the FMP tenets (e.g., Key Performance Indicators, Quality Assurance Agreement, Verification Review), which resulted in a group of people that possessed working knowledge about student outcomes and compliance issues, and was equipped to effect positive changes in these areas.   However, without this funding, this district coordinator as well as many other district coordinators related that it would have been much harder to provide teachers with training or to provide curricular programs that would benefit students.

I'm not saying $75,000… That was very generous, at least for a district of our size. But to be able to make plans over the year to do something like this. We don't spend it all on special education. Part of it goes into special education resources, but a lot of it goes into – most of it's going into teachers traveling. Attending the leadership institutes, going to other school districts and observing what happens and how other people do things. We're kind of isolated out here. We're a lonely little rural school district with not much in the way of resources near us. And to be able to send teachers away for two days, it's a couple hundred dollars for substitutes, and it's a couple hundred dollars for overnight stays and a couple hundred dollars for transportation. That's resources that special education departments don't have. And general education people have their own goals that they focus on, and generally don't include that kind of thing. So it's been something that we've been able to stimulate.

…The schools have gotten some excellent training from this because of the money. Without that money they wouldn't have been able to get the kind of training that they have gotten.

We are currently undergoing a total reorganization of how we use school site counsel to allocate categorical money. We've stopped an age-old process of allocating monies for teacher initiated proposals. We are now redirecting that money into direct support systems for students. We are expecting that a lot of that money will help us continue as a Focused Monitoring team. Although we would certainly love to have continued receiving Focused Monitoring money.

One site combined similar funding sources (e.g., FMP funding, Title 1, II/USP), and developed an integrated "master" plan.

> I think they could all stand alone, but the integration of them all, the coordination of them all, has made the boat go faster. Because we've insisted that all of those supplemental funding sources, requirements, objectives, et cetera, be in one plan. So we're not working on five different plans. We have one plan per site, which includes all of them. Which insists on that coordination. So no, they wouldn't stand alone. They could stand alone, but together they're better.

Throughout the second year of FMP (2000-2001), districts concentrated their efforts on a few of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that initially determined their participation in FMP. While these varied from district to district, many of the district coordinators spoke on a few KPIs in particular. These included improving literacy scores, hiring more certificated teachers, and increasing special education inclusion in the general education classroom. Districts wrote a plan, the Quality Assurance Agreement, which outlined the specific areas of needed improvement, the manner in which improvement would be made and determined (through data collection), and a timeline for meeting goals.

Many of their professional development efforts went towards achieving those goals. From the interview analysis, district coordinators reported that training was an important and essential component to making desired changes and improvements in district practices. FMP allowed districts to participate in leadership training and professional development institutes to achieve that end.

Leadership and capacity building. Leadership training was provided by private consultants to participating school districts. These trainings revolved around topics of building trust, improving communication, and collaborating that focused on "round table discussion" as opposed to top-down mandates. These training opportunities focused district team members on different models of communication, team or capacity building, and leadership. For example,

> Those leadership trainings have been helpful at looking at models, networking, sharing concerns and having an opportunity to bring some tools back to better implement that process in our district. We've found them valuable. It's also helped us to build teams at the site, collaborative teams, which have been a key mover and shaker. We're a high school district and have seven large high schools. I'd say the critical thing is to help build those teams and clarify those roles and what that process looks like.

One district coordinator reported that the leadership training convinced key personnel of the importance and benefits of the FM process as well. For example,

> What it did for us, as far as our district team, is it got the principals involved in the process a lot more and in a greater buy-in. The principals have taken ownership of special education at their sites. What's nice about that, I'm a special education director, obviously I sell it. But the leadership training has helped the site administrators understand the need for us to be focused on this. I think that has helped a lot.

In one district, the leadership training did not change the way the team members worked together because they were already working collaboratively. The district coordinator reported that the leadership training did, however, provide information for the school's already "established" team to incorporate into their existing collaborative efforts. The district coordinator stated:

> I think it's informational for us, more than the actual building of our team. Our team is very close as it is, I don't think that the leadership made it any closer. It was informational.

Professional development. As a result of Focused Monitoring, districts were able to provide professional development training to their teachers and staff. Typically, these professional development trainings revolved around each district's selected key performance indicators (KPIs), but especially around collaboration and inclusion.

The majority of district coordinators reported that collaboration models specifically addressed special education and general education teachers to work together to address the needs of all students, but with an emphasis on special education students. Also, inclusion models were addressed at these training sessions as they go hand-in-hand with collaboration. For example,

> We found, through the CalSTAT conferences and the CDE-sponsored leadership conferences, that it's helped us to move towards implementation of the inclusion district idea and at our sites… We have sent teams representing all of our high schools to a lot of inclusion and collaboratives. We sent them to the Burr Conference. We sent general ed and special ed teachers together as a team to work on collaborative models and inclusion strategies. That's been our primary focus and target. We have a five-year plan of implementation of inclusion in our district as a result of that KPI. We've targeted those kinds of trainings. We're sending teams to the special ed field meeting coming up in March. We have had consultants come in to deal specifically with collaboration and inclusion. We've sponsored some district-wide staff trainings. We started as a part of Focused Monitoring. We sponsored what we called a special ed conference right before our school year started and we've continued that and

brought in keynote speakers. We bring in all of our special ed teachers and we talk about updated strategies in our plan. That's the major gist of our budget focus. We've been having consultants come in and hands-on work with our teachers and send teams out. Our next phase of that is that we've made contact with some other high schools going through a similar process that are model schools and now we're going to be doing some visitations and have questions to help us with our process. That's our training motto and focus.

This year, the one we just ended in January did introduce some new concepts. It was more about the greater collaboration and integration with general education. We looked at some model programs. We looked at some issues having to do with systemic changes. I thought it was very important. I think when we started Focused Monitoring we were sort of in a state of chaos. We were looking to fix the program and get compliant. Now that has been done we can actually focus more on the systemic issues that would make this program a lot more viable.

For the majority of FM districts, district coordinators reported that the training and institutes on collaboration and inclusion positively affected district staff perceptions and attitudes.

It's not so much things that you learn, it's more attitudes that are developed. It's more relationships. It's more the collaborations and the conversations that teachers have together. It's those kinds of things that were sparked by the leadership institutes where I see the difference.

Yes. At the teacher level and the school level the feedback has been very positive. They felt they received excellent training on collaborative services and learning techniques for working with special education kids more effectively, as well as other kids at risk.

Professional development also included information, models, and suggestions for addressing the specific KPIs that the district leadership teams chose to improve. A couple of the district administrators reflected on the effects of this strand of professional development:

Without any doubt, each of us felt that we had come so much further than other districts have. And not all of them being Focused Monitoring, of course. But we were very, very pleased with where we had come. And that's partially because of the trainings identified by the Focused Monitoring project… There were some excellent sessions, there was one by [one presenter] on behavior interventions, management, whatever you want to call it, that was excellent. The rest of it seemed very mundane to me.

It helped us with preparation and what direction we wanted to continue to go… It helped us bring information back to the team, other things we could try to include in our plan.

Connecting with others. Whether the training was about leadership development, collaboration and inclusion models, or best practices that could aid in improving a district's KPIs, the underlying essence reported by many district coordinators was the connection with experts in the education field that occurred as a result of the trainings. This administrator sums it up best:

> There were some good things there. I think the best thing they offer, to be honest about it, is connecting with people. And what's available out there. I think most school districts don't know that there are people out there who have online training things, they have people who can help you connect on e-mail if you need to. Getting the word out is the hardest thing.

In addition to connections with experts in the field of education, these institutes also provided FM districts with opportunities to talk with other FM districts as well as with "model" districts about similar experiences and issues with respect to FM implementation, curricular, and student needs. For example,

> I think that it is always good to collaborate with other focused monitoring districts. There was a lot of that this time. Also this year, this is kind of training, we met with two other focused monitoring districts in Palm Springs. We articulated and collaborated there. We will be meeting again this year with them. That is training also… It was good. Collaboration is always good. We actually presented a round table. So we didn't get around to the other round tables because we presented our own three times. There was a high school Strand, which was very helpful. A learning strand, so we spent a lot of time in the high school strand. Talking about high school issues. Of course, since our focus is literacy, the literacy strand was very informative…

Along with improving student outcomes, district personnel set out to improve compliance with IDEA '97. While this has proven to be an arduous process over the years (as described in previous FMP evaluation reports), district personnel recognized the positive changes and improvements in this area. Many interviewees have stated over the years that there has been increased awareness at all levels in the district of the necessity to be compliant. Furthermore, there have been actual changes in practices that enabled districts to be compliant. These practices included changing Individualize Education Plan (IEP) forms to contain all elements necessary for compliance as well as manuals that teachers and administrators were trained on in order to increase awareness and knowledge of correctly completing the IEP.

The following sections describe the results of the survey and interview analyses. In particular, several areas of interest are addressed. These include information on how the FMP program impacted district participants and practices, factors that may have

influenced the success of FMP program implementation, and concerns about the sustainability and future of improvements in student outcomes and compliance.

FMP Program Effects

In addressing the evaluation questions related to program effects, the data is presented descriptively, drawing mainly from the survey data (including open-ended responses) and the district administrator interview analysis.

(1) What have been the effects of Focused Monitoring on district participants and district practices for special education students?

Survey Scale Analysis

The survey scale, *Improvement Efforts*, measures the effect that Focused Monitoring is having on indicators of student performance and program implementation. Table 9 presents the weighted survey scale mean for *Improvement Efforts*. Survey participants tended to agree with items in the scale (refer to Appendix D for items related to scale). Responses affirm the program's effect in improving district KPIs and IEP compliance as a result of the FMP program. Furthermore, continued use of data in planning and decision-making, and an overall perception of success of the program seems to be occurring within these districts. The survey results are further supported by interviews with the district coordinators.

Table 9

Average Rating on *Improvement Effort* Survey Scale

Survey Scale	n	*M (SD)*
Improvement Efforts	13	3.18 (.25)

Note. Responses were based on a Likert-type scale: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *agree*, 4 = *strongly agree*.

District Coordinator Interview Analysis

Interview analysis concentrated on various areas related to the effects of Focused Monitoring on district participants and practices, including: team processes and impact

on practice. Each of these areas contains several themes that impacted participants and the practices used to improve student outcomes.

Effects of FM and District Team Process

At the heart of the FM program was the district leadership team. In *Year Three* (2001-2002), district coordinators reflected on aspects of attitude change and collaboration as a result of implementing the FM program (e.g., taking ownership of the FM process within their districts). The dependence on state consultants in *Year Three* decreased, but the majority of districts expressed a need for some level of access to state consultants beyond this third year of the FM process.

FM team building. One theme that emerged from the interviews was the evolution of the district team. This evolution started with team members learning about their roles in the FM program and within the team function. As everybody's role became clear, teams were able to take on the responsibility of spreading information about Focused Monitoring from special education to regular education, and from the district level team to administrators and teachers at school sites. For example,

> The ability to work together. The ability to have an open mind, and that the members of the team that we selected were very strong people who were ready to take on that challenge. It's the buy-in that we got.

> As a leadership team we all contribute. We try to have working activities where we get everyone's input. We will make recommendations back here to the special ed department and to the cabinet to drive those agendas at the sites and at the schools. I would say that our group is very much involved… On the average, at a meeting we get at a minimum of 15 [people] and they are active, contributing participants. We try to set the activities so that we're brainstorming and we're actively involved in looking at ways and sharing. A lot of us go to some of the trainings. We try to make it worthwhile function, not just to meet because we need to meet. We do have some very productive meetings and we have minutes that we share and give feedback. I would say that our overall group is very actively involved. They feel comfortable sharing and debating issues. It's not always one way. There are disagreements.

While district teams were busy with the process of organization, the developmental process of the teams also created opportunities for personnel from different areas within a district to voice concerns and opinions of problems with current student outcomes. A couple of district coordinators reported that their team members

began to recognize the importance of taking responsibility for student outcomes, especially for the special education population.

> Go back and say, "Okay, we're all responsible. Not putting the onus on anyone in particular. We are all responsible." We have a motto that says, "Children are our business." "Children belong to all of us," this kind of thing. It wasn't like, "These are special ed kids, and these are Title I kids, and these are the GATE students, and these are your kids and my kids, and my kids are improving, not yours." We need to make them all improve, no matter what program they're coming from.

> We focused as a district that this is not a special ed thing, but this is a district-wide push for literacy and special ed happens to have given us that impetus. I guess impetus is the best word to describe the special ed focus in there, but it's spread district-wide. We had a mini-retreat middle of January, where everyone again was invited and paid to come if they chose to. Out of 300 staff, we had slightly more than 100, but that included all layers of staff, from bus drivers to principals. So it really is a district push towards literacy, and we've really grabbed onto Steve's making the boat go faster. Everybody's involved in making that happen.

District/site collaboration. The majority of district teams were very involved in a collaborative process with various areas and departments within their districts. Once team members and district personnel were able to recognize the need for everyone to take a stake in the education of special education students, collaboration could occur. Several district coordinators reported that collaboration occurred most often between general and special education staff with varying levels of guidance and support from school site administrators.

> We sent general ed and special ed teachers together as a team to work on collaborative models and inclusion strategies. That's been our primary focus and target. We have a five-year plan of implementation of inclusion in our district as a result of that KPI. We've targeted those kinds of trainings. We're sending teams to the special ed field meeting coming up in March. We have had consultants come in to deal specifically with collaboration and inclusion.

> They have collaborative groups at their sites and principals meet on an ongoing basis and assistant principals. In every group [Focused Monitoring] shouldn't be a foreign word and they do know what we're talking about.

> We have participation from general ed, regular education, administration, the board, and the community. We hold monthly meetings, and at those meetings we review what's going on with Focused Monitoring, and look for recommendations of where we want to go next.

Lots of discussion. People did not feel threatened in voicing their opinion or recommendations. We all have an equal vote. It was successful because there was a lot of collaboration and trust… I felt like I had to learn how to let go and not micromanage a lot. I had to trust people to do some of the stuff for me. That I was still accountable. I think it's changed where I have seen that instead of making decisions for special ed, that regular ed and special ed are working closer together. I find myself going back and involving the regular ed people in the decisions that I'm making. And that they involve us, as well.

One of the biggest changes that districts have made as a result of FMP was the creation of a leadership team that included all levels of staff, students and parents. According the district coordinators, this multidisciplinary team was able to communicate and collaborate with each other in a trusting and honest manner to address the educational needs of their students and their districts.

Impact on Practice

According to the district coordinators, FMP has had direct impact on district practices and on improved student outcomes. Several sub-themes emerged from this interview analysis, all related to FMP's impact on practice. These sub-themes include district data, compliance, collaboration, and inclusion efforts.

District data. More than half of the district coordinators reported that the FM process has given their district an opportunity to look at their data for special education students. Furthermore, districts expanded their improvement efforts to general education students. That is, districts were looking to improve student outcomes for *all* students.

We added the increase in performance on the SAT9 and decreased expulsions. We're collecting data now on the number of special ed students suspended and expelled. We're looking at the SAT9 scores as we do with regular students. We get a baseline and for those last two, this will be our baseline year, so then we can track. That's been critical. One of the things that we found out, as we go to CalSTAT and we go out through the networks, that getting that kind of data and putting it out there has been a success for bringing people along. You have something quantitative to say, "This is where we are and this is why we need to move in this direction." That generates a lot of conversation.

As a district, even without that being a KPI, we had moved in the last couple of years towards using data to drive divisions because of the SAT9 and all of that. We were having a lot of in services district wide, using data to drive decisions and implement programs. As a district we were already moving in that direction. It wasn't foreign for us. We've even built in new programs like our reporting system.

As a result of FM, several district coordinators stated that they were not looking solely at student data, but they were looking at other data that impacts practice. For example, the percentage of teachers with special education credentials was not simply something many FM districts gloss over now, but they were taking measures to increase this number. A couple of district coordinators reported on how their respective districts were taking different measures to improve in this area.

> We keep data on credentialing. Data for assessment is very closely monitored. It's something that we factor into our MIS. One of our key performance indicators was that a greater numbers of students will access the district and state assessments, the S... 9 testing. We went to 96%. From 55% or 56% we went to 96%.

> We had the assistant superintendent in charge of human resources talk about fully credentialing the teachers, staff development opportunities and where teachers are in their credential process. We talked about assessments being taken by the kids, how we improved in that area and our other KPIs, drop out rates and things like that.

According to these district coordinators, keeping track of the data became important in determining the level of success and improvement in their plans.

Compliance. One of the driving forces behind the FMP was to improve compliance on behalf of special education students. In considering compliance, the majority of districts reevaluated their district's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) in terms of content or in terms of timeline procedures as stipulated in IDEA '97. In turn, district practice and student programming was addressed through this reevaluation process in many of the FM districts. For example,

> One was the pre-referral notice, which was never being sent out. We had to redo the SST process, where if they're considering a referral to special ed they send a pre-referral notice. We threw out our IEP forms and developed brand new forms. We had to redo the way the teacher's assessment reports were redone, the literacy statements that teachers and psychologists had to put on the reports were redone, we had to monitor whether teachers were monitoring students' goals and objectives and their achievement towards goals and objectives.

> For IEPs, what we're doing is monitoring. We do a monthly monitoring. We send out a worksheet every month to the individual principals, stating which IEPs are overdue. Program specialists have been going out to the sites. We've also hired two mentor teachers to help write IEPs. And we've time-carded, we've brought back some retired teachers on time cards to help write IEPs.

We had about 16 people. We addressed not only the year-end report, issues regarding completion of IEPs and tri-annuals, the appropriate placement of students and services that students are receiving.

As a result of FM, district staff became increasingly aware of the importance of meeting compliance:

People felt very comfortable and understood that when I tell you to do something at your site because it's compliant, it's not because I'm upset at you. It's that we need to get this done for the good of everybody. I think that was the most beneficial thing that it did bring people together in a communal kind of environment to reach a common goal.

Collaboration. The majority of district coordinators reported that the FM program had a profound affect on collaboration in their district and school sites. To this end, discussions about collaboration practices occurred at both the district level and at the school site level. Several district coordinators reported that collaboration efforts at the district level resulted in improved communication and enhanced overall district program planning. For example,

I think learning to work in collaboration. I think that's been very important. It was nice to have teachers meeting with administrators in a relaxed atmosphere, working together for a common goal. It really did bring us together.

We have learned that there needs to be a lot of communication of what is being done, but that we need to have continuous monitoring of the progress of our students. And ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of our program.

The majority of district coordinators reported that collaboration at the school site level primarily occurred between special and general education teachers. The FM program helped to bridge the gap between the specialized knowledge that special education teachers possess with the mainstream knowledge possessed by general education teachers. Through this collaborative effort, many FM districts began to focus on student achievement for all students rather than issues of compliance on "paper" for special education students.

One way that I do that is that we initiated a program two years ago that all special ed teachers go to core department meetings. So a special ed teacher that teaches English goes to the English Department meetings. Special Ed is not being taught in isolation. They share. They discuss textbooks, procedure, and methodology. There is a greater amount of

collaboration. One of our KPIs was to have a greater integration. It said, "A greater number of students will be integrated 80% of the day or more." To make sure that occurs, one of the things we have is all special ed teachers attend core meetings and they have to get along.

I think, collaboration, and the integration of regular and special education. And that there needs to be more focus on student achievement than compliance. 09.Y3 p19 537-538

We have learned that collaboration with regular education is absolutely key. Also we have learned that special education staff can become curricular and instructional leaders and that they should become that.

I think the collaboration going on between regular education and special education, the buy-in we're getting, the ability to implement the programs we've implemented, the whole focus hasn't been on compliance. It has been on improving student achievement. It used to be just compliance, compliance, compliance. And there's still that component, but we are actually talking about student achievement and growth, and what's best for kids. That didn't used to be the way it was. It used to be "are you in compliance?" Didn't matter if the kid didn't learn anything in the twelve years he was in special ed, as long as you are compliant. Now, you are looking at: are these kids progressing in the programs we're providing, and how can we improve the programs?

Collaboration among the team members was an important and necessary element that provided teams with opportunities to achieve success with student outcomes.

Inclusion. In order for effective inclusion measures to occur at school sites, sound collaboration practice at both the district and school site level needs to be in effect. Therefore, FM districts were at varying places on the continuum for effective collaborative and inclusive practices. However, since *Year One* all FM districts have been moving in a positive direction on this continuum--some more efficiently and effectively than others. For example,

The whole inclusion practice has certainly been very much changed. The RSP teachers have become consulting collaborating teachers. Our RSP core classes used to be self-contained. So now they are not. The kids are in the regular education classes. The teachers are in those classes as helpers, collaborating with the regular education teachers, then providing support for the students. The whole business of grade examination and analysis has become different because the grades that we are looking at have become regular education grades. Regular education teachers as opposed to the RSP teachers given to our students.

Then of course special education students are also included in core classes. Also in lots of other arenas that have to do with club membership and going to prom and that sort of thing.

> The students give a staff luncheon every year that has been really important in bringing them to the front of school life. They give presentations and stand up and show what they can do and what they need to have happen for them in classes. They have also become better self-advocates, I would say.

> I think collaboration really put the need for structured reading programs on the front burner for the special education kids and the high risk kids. I think that it has given all teachers good strategies for working with special education and high risk kids. I think its given a real good look at the need for articulated structured reading from elementary to middle to senior high, for those kids that need it. I think it's… Yes, it has helped bring literacy to the forefront… The overall umbrella of those three or four things is that we are really, for the first time looking at success and progress of special kids. Based on academic achievement, literacy in the area of reading. Moving to a less restrictive environment because the reading skills have improved.

District coordinators all remarked on the positive impact that inclusion models were having on students. Furthermore, they reported that teachers noticed how well inclusion was working within their own classrooms. If inclusion is the model that the state is trying to promote, it would be worthwhile to explore actual classroom practices and student outcomes as a result of including special education students in the general education classroom.

(2) Which factors influenced the success of Focused Monitoring during *Year Three*?

To answer this question, a variety of data sources were used, including survey data, the open-ended survey questions, and the district coordinator interview analysis.

Survey Scale Analysis

Three scales, *Team Effectiveness*, *State Consultant Services*, and *Accountability* scales, measure factors that may contribute to the success in implementing Focused Monitoring within the districts. In Table 10 are presented weighted survey scale means for each of the scales. Team members who participated in the survey had a tendency to agree with the items in each of the scales.

Table 10

Average Rating on *Team Effectiveness*, *State Consultant Services*, and *Accountability* Survey Scales

Survey Scales	n	M (SD)
Team Effectiveness	13	3.06 (.42)
State Consultant Services	13	3.24 (.49)
Accountability	13	3.21 (.36)

Note. Responses were based on a Likert-type scale: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *agree*, 4 = *strongly agree*.

A glance at the average weighted scores demonstrates that survey participants tended to agree with the statements comprising these scales (refer to Appendix D for items related to scales). With regard to *Team Effectiveness*, survey participants believed that other team members, regardless of their position (e.g., superintendent, teacher, principal) were actively involved in team meetings and decision-making and that the team worked effectively together. Furthermore, participants perceive there to be increased communication and collaboration at the district, between general and special education personnel, between teachers and principals, and between school sites and the district administration.

Survey participants also agreed with items regarding their experiences with the state consultant and the services those consultants brought to the district as revealed in the *State Consultant Services* scale. In general, participants perceive their state consultants to be available, knowledgeable, and the information they provided useful to the district.

Finally, participants agreed with items in the *Accountability* scale. Participants perceived that the district and team should be held responsible for the educational outcomes of their students and compliance issues of student IEPs, as seen in the average score for the *Accountability* scale.

Open-ended Survey Data

From the survey, there were several questions regarding components that promoted or hampered FMP implementation. These questions required that participants write their responses and provide examples.

Survey participants provided many examples that promoted FMP success. Out of these examples, several themes emerged, including *Relationship-building*, *Task*

Orientation, and *Resources.* Within each of these themes, factors that led to or challenged FMP success is discussed.

Relationship-building. One of the successful components was the amount of relationship building, sometimes called capacity building, that was going on in these school districts. District participants mentioned that their teams were multidisciplinary in nature. This allowed for the discussion of problems and the exchange of ideas from multiple perspectives. There was the involvement of teachers and school site administrators. There was a sense of district support for the team and its mission to improve student outcomes. All of these aspects were brought together within the leadership team meeting.

What allowed for this relationship building was the overall sense of teamwork. Everyone on the team was there to work with each other in order to identify and address district issues. There were team-building activities that created opportunities for team members to work on essential skills as communication and collaboration. Participants mentioned a newly found honesty that was occurring during the team meetings. The ability to be honest allowed for even better communication and collaboration to occur with each meeting. The end result, as mentioned by survey participants, was an increased level of teamwork that had not existed before.

Another factor that enabled the team to have this sense of relationship building was the level of support and accountability for the work the team members were trying to accomplish. There was an acknowledgement that they needed to address the issues in their districts and that they had a responsibility to all of their students to ensure a fair and quality education. There was competent leadership and support from personnel to push the agenda forward. These elements gave the district teams the ability to communicate and collaborate in order to do the work of improving their students' outcomes.

While there were many components that contributed to the success of team building, there were factors that challenged the teams' ability to be successful. These factors included attitudes toward change and the human element. Survey participants provided several examples of negative attitudes that seemed to be a challenge to overcome. Examples included a resistance to change and an overall sense of pessimism towards the FMP activities and district goals. Many people acknowledged that the predominant line of thinking on special education and inclusion (e.g., special education students are not the responsibility of the general education staff) was a very challenging

aspect to try to change in order to achieve the districts' goals to include special education students in the general education classroom. This example coincides with another regarding the difficulty to "sell" ideas to the staff of changing current practices. These examples all pointed towards the challenge of transforming attitudes. They also demonstrated that behind these attitudes were people who may not be as involved in the FMP process as the actual team members but who needed convincing that change was a good thing rather than being resistant towards it.

Besides changing attitudes, the human element also presented a challenge to building relationships in the district teams. Many team members remarked that there was a lack of involvement of parents, students, and teachers in FMP and on the team even though they were the ones who were truly carrying out the work involved from district team decisions. Other survey participants also provided examples of constant changes in the administration or district team membership that made the work of FMP that much harder to do. Finally, the dissemination of information among team members and to non-team member staff about the purpose and expectations behind FMP also presented a challenge for team members to attack.

These examples suggest that while there were many successful aspects of FMP-related activities with regard to relationship building, there were some definite potholes along the road to success that made the journey a challenging one.

Task Orientation. Another successful component was that of task orientation. Through the FMP, district teams were exposed to areas, through the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), that needed to be addressed in order to improve the standing of their schools in California. As teams met, they selected certain KPIs to focus their attention. An awareness of the KPIs and the desired improvements permeated the minds of these multidisciplinary team members. Participants mentioned a renewed focus on their special education and resource students. The renewed focus, and awareness of other KPIs, led teams to establish goals and expectations for their students. For instance, the team members established a goal to include these students in the general education curriculum in order to provide them with opportunities to learn with their general education counterparts and to graduate with a diploma. Also part of their task orientation was a renewed, and necessary, focus on improving district compliance issues. District teams found themselves out of compliance on many items with IDEA '97 particularly as the FMP began. An element of the district team task orientation was to devote part of their energies to changing patterns of behavior and documentation such that compliance with special education regulations could be achieved.

In order to follow through on team-established goals and expectations, team members recognized the need for focusing specifically on student achievement, needs, and successes. This required reviewing data on their students' performance (e.g., literacy programs). As well as reviewing student data, team members also acknowledged the need to analyze the things that were working, or not working, for the team so that they were not held back in making progress. Also, an important element that teams used was to continue with the same KPIs over the years of the FMP. By sticking to the same KPIs, teams were enabled to correct noncompliance or improve student outcomes rather than become inundated with work by diffusing their attentions in multiple directions.

As much as the teams were able to concentrate on their tasks and push their agenda forward, there were also structural and personnel issues that challenged the success of the teams. For instance, scheduling conflicts and the school day structure made it difficult for team members to meet on a regular basis. There was always some other meeting for people to attend, and class schedules made it difficult for teachers to get involved in the process. In the process of hiring qualified teachers, districts now have to deal with too many new teachers who were needing the training to become part of the school and district culture, not to mention learning to teach and manage their students. These structural and personnel issues affected to some degree the teams' abilities to address student outcomes and compliance issues.

Resources. In order to sustain improvements from FMP activities and address district team goals and expectations, survey participants expressed the importance of resources. These resources came in a variety of forms. Professional development gave tools to the teachers and staff that helped in the implementation of a variety of programs, including literacy and full inclusion. At leadership conferences, district personnel were able to connect with each other to share troubles as well as ideas and programs that worked to improve student outcomes. Also, these conferences provided opportunities for district personnel to learn leadership skills that could enhance their abilities to work with each other as a team and as an individual within the district.

The above themes came from many examples that survey participants provided in response to the open-ended questions. These themes are amplified in the following section.

District Coordinator Interview Analysis

Several areas from the interview analysis emerged as factors that were perceived as contributing to the success of Focused Monitoring in these facilitated districts. These included leadership, perceptions of the state consultants, and challenging factors.

Leadership

According to the district coordinators, strong leadership was an important factor that could "make or break" FMP in the district. The analysis of the interviews that addressed leadership resulted in sub-themes, including superintendent and administrator involvement, and transitions of persons in leadership positions.

Superintendent and administrator involvement. One common theme that ran throughout the district administrator interviews was the positive effect that FMP had on leaders in the district, particularly with the superintendent, assistant superintendents, and site principals. Specifically, the level of support provided by a district superintendents and/or an assistant superintendent to initiate this reform effort in the district and school sites was acknowledged. For example:

> Fortunately for us our superintendent was the one who initiated getting our district involved. He has been with us through this process. That has made it very effective for us to be able to move the agenda. He has always been supportive from his level.

> … this Focused Monitoring process has emphasized more of an 'Are we doing the right thing? Is there a better way to do this?' kind of objective. That's been very instrumental. It got my superintendent 's attention, and through him it got the attention of the district level staff and the school leadership. And, while that didn't really necessarily continue on down to the teacher level, because they're not so concerned with that, it got the attention of the leadership of the district.

> I think the support we've gotten from the assistant superintendent, the support we've gotten from curriculum and instruction, the support we've gotten from curriculum specialists, have helped us. When we've had testing issues and the director of testing has come to the focused monitoring meetings, and gone over testing information. We have curriculum issues and the appropriate curriculum person would come to the meeting. Especially when we're discussing literacy, and what type of programs we should purchase. We had a lot of support from curriculum and staff development.

In addition to superintendent support, several district coordinators reported that principal support was equally important in successfully implementing the FMP at the

school site level. In some districts, the FMP helped to foster a level of collegiality amongst principals within a district. For example:

> What it did for us, as far as out district team, is it got the principals involved in the process a lot more and in a greater buy-in. The principals have taken ownership of special education at their sites. But the leadership training has helped the site administrators understand the need for us to be focused on this. I think that has helped a lot.

> We have had ongoing in-service [training] for the principals. They're fully aware, because they laugh every time we mention QAP. They're fully aware of the process. At principal's meetings I update them, where we are and where we're going. We do an annual in-service with our consultant on the QAP process and what we've done and where we're going, and what are non-compliances, and what we need to clean up. So the administrators are fully aware of the program and the implementations. I've sent out bulletins. We have a bulletin process in this district. I send out bulletins on a regular basis, updating them on compliance issues and on activities and things that are going on.

This administrator went on to say:

> I think the principal supports the efforts, because she called me in when we first wanted to apply, and she supports the efforts, and it's basically in line with the district. The district has the focus, a five-year plan, and this is part of the five-year plan.

District administration and principal support and buy-in was reported by district coordinators as being important to implementing Focused Monitoring effectively. While there was acknowledged support from the superintendent in the majority of districts, there were some issues when this support was not secured. One district in particular felt pressure from the state to improve superintendent involvement, with little or no support from the FMP or state consultant to gain this support from their superintendent.

> Some of the challenges were getting the pressure from the State that the superintendent needed to participate in these meetings, that they needed to be there, the main stakeholders needed to be there, that this was to include the movement of whatever movement this district was going to. They can pressure us all they want, but those are our bosses, and we can't tell them to do something they don't want to do. It was very discouraging for the working ants to say, "You know what? We're doing our best here, and we're trying to do all this, and you're going to put us down because you're saying our superintendent's not participating." You can't make the person participate if they don't feel that this is a priority to them.

While FM may not have been a "priority" to some of the superintendents according to some district coordinators, their lack of involvement did not necessarily equate to a lack of support to the district staff involved in the process.

Transitions in leadership. One major factor that potentially impacts the success of Focused Monitoring in the districts includes the mechanisms by which districts are able to deal with staff transitions and turnover, especially when the positions of turnover include people in leadership positions, such as the superintendent or school principal. A noticeable trend throughout a majority of the districts was the change in personnel from one year to the next. While FMP was in its third year, several of the interviewees were in their first year as FMP coordinator. Of these, a couple were in their first year at that particular district. While these transitions in personnel did not seem to have substantive effects on the implementation of FMP (according to the district coordinator interviews), one way districts addressed personnel transitions was to give training on Focused Monitoring to new personnel.

Several district coordinators reported that training to new staff and personnel was important to continue the flow of Focused Monitoring activities within their district. A couple of districts mentioned that they actually have a training component to get new personnel "up to speed" on Focused Monitoring activities. For instance, while change in personnel was not really an issue in one district, there was training to make sure that the new staff was informed about Focused Monitoring:

> We've had the same superintendent and assistant superintendent throughout. There's been some consistency there. Two of the big schools had changes in the associate principal. Both happened to be in charge of special ed. The transition was very smooth. Good, eager, young administrators and I have worked with them very closely so that there was no drop off. One school did much better than the other right away. The other just took a few extra weeks and we were caught up. The change of personnel was basically in the associate principals. It really wasn't a factor. We addressed it really well. We did that training right away.

In other districts, while transitions have not affected greatly the ability to address Focused Monitoring activities, there were other types of training such as manuals or handbooks to bring staff on board:

> We have a handbook for all teachers that come into the district, or new personnel. We also have a new teacher academy for those people to bring awareness of all the services and everything that goes on in the district. But we had that even before Focused Monitoring. Now, it's what we emphasize even more so.

It's not built on personnel. It definitely is a systemic change. It really doesn't matter who's there. They are brought on board. They're told when they come to work with this district that the first thing to even be considered in hiring is out focus on literacy. Many of the teachers that come on board, they are told: "You will be teaching literacy. If that's not something you don't want to do, then go elsewhere." They're really straightforward people when they bring them on board. Same with the administrators.

While transitions and staff turnover occur frequently at all levels in a district, it would seem that districts were readily able to cope with them, including the provision of training. Even in hiring practices, districts were looking for potential personnel who will perpetuate the philosophy and work of improving student outcomes. However, because respondents were not directly or negatively affected by a "key" personnel transition, the majority of district coordinators that responded to this question hypothesized that they would be able to handle a change in key personnel. This is an area that could benefit from further exploration.

State Consultants

In identifying aspects that contributed to the success of Focused Monitoring, district coordinators described their perceptions of the state consultants' quality of services and commitment to the district as well as lingering concerns.

State Consultant: Quality of Services. Overall, the majority of district coordinators reported in *Year Three* that they were satisfied with the services received from their state consultant. The state consultants were reported as being good problem solvers and motivators as well as easily accessible for answering questions. For example,

Lots of good ideas and a lot of the practices that we're putting in place are a result of the discussions that started in that arena. It has been very helpful to have our consultant there to help clarify some of those issues and provide support too. Truthfully we're going to miss that. That's been a critical element in keeping that group motivated and alive… Sometimes there were issues of compliance, process, procedure or we were grappling for a resource to make this happen and having that person right there "Oh this is how we can do it." or "This is the State's interpretation." That was very, very, very helpful.

The state consultant really did the most important thing possible and that is she helped with the site buy in. That was very, very important. We couldn't just fix things at the district office. When the state person made the principal realize, when she dragged off all the principals over to Palm Springs for that first leadership conference, she made them realize if a compliance issue comes up again it will be at the sites. The principals basically understand that they had better be compliant at their sites. They can't say that the district didn't give us

support. I think the most important issue is that the site administration understands how important it is for them to maintain compliance.

I feel total support. Whenever I have a question, I can call them. They e-mail me, return my phone calls immediately. Our manager has been fabulous. He has come down here, or we've gone up there, and he's made time for us. So I think the support has been superb. This year.

I think she's on the cutting edge of what is going on in terms of instruction and what is available. In terms of free training and low-cost and who's hot. [Consultant X] has really been great about that. She will say, 'so and so district is doing this great two day thing on such and such, you guys should try to go.' She has really been helpful.

She is always just an e-mail away. She answers my e-mail immediately. If I leave a phone message she either e-mails or phones back immediately. If I mention, even casually, that I want to bring a training to our staff she starts researching and figuring out how we can do it. She is here whenever we need to have her. In the verification review process she was as comforting and supporting as she could possibly be, given that it is a horrific process.

An important theme to emerge from the data was the decrease in dependency on the state consultant during *Year Three*. *Year Two* had been a pivotal year in building a strong knowledge base and understanding for FM teams to operate with less guidance in *Year Three*.

She really hasn't had much of an impact this year because we haven't seen her. We don't need her as much. We have weaned ourselves from needing [our state consultant]. She has been an excellent resource for the two years.

However, while the majority of district coordinators reported the need for less contact with and assistance from their state consultant, more than half reported a desire for some level of monitoring or "checking in" by the state consultant when the FM support decreases. This sentiment, to a large degree, can best be summed up by one district coordinator who reflected on issues concerning buy-in and the confidence that individuals outside the FM team's sphere of influence will continue to follow the tenets established by the FM process.

[Consultant Y] says that she is going to be there for us whenever we call. I believe that she will. We have established a wonderful link. I don't perceive that would go away. Even though I know that we are not going to use her as much because it won't be her role. I feel as though we have a wonderful contact that is supportive and will always guide us in the

directions we need to be guided. If we ask her questions about how to proceed in certain arenas… I feel that she is a wonderful supportive contact for us.

State Consultants: Lingering Concerns with Services. While the majority of school districts reported that they were satisfied with the services that they received from their state consultant during *Year Three*, a few districts expressed concerns about services provided by their state consultant relating to communication, both timeliness and consistency, concerns that continue to persist from the previous years. Although only a few districts expressed this concern, it is important to consider the impact that this concern has on a district. That is, communication breakdown has the potential to interrupt the momentum for districts that depend on getting this feedback in a timely manner in order to proceed with the FM process in their districts. In the case where communication between state consultants and a district was inconsistent, frustration levels were likely to increase and morale may be negatively affected. For example,

> She would give us a lot of information. "Look, I brought this from this district and this district and this district, and you guys can use it." But never really an actual, "Let me sit down, hands-on, and take you through the process and show you how to do this." Never. It was just giving us, read it and read it and read it, and do it on your own, and use it if you can. That was not helpful. I could have pulled that stuff down on the Internet myself.

> I don't think the person we got was very knowledgeable. She came in and was very confused herself, and would tell us, "You're doing great," and then another moment – at the end of this whole thing when we did our exit meeting, we found out there were problems. "You guys aren't following through, and your superintendent didn't participate," and it was the first time we heard there were any problems. There was not good communication in that sense. She would give us one timeline, and if it wasn't done on time, because they got on her case about something not getting done on time, then it became our problem. When we had agreed on a certain timeline. The other one was, we just felt we had a consultant that didn't go back and really communicate or understand what we were doing in the district.

Of the FM districts represented in this sample, one district FM coordinator attributed the lack of consistency and contact with their state consultant to the workload coming from the CDE.

> The trouble with the State Department people is that they're way over-extended. Tremendously over-extended. So even when I ask for something, to get the return call, you never know. Some are really good, and some are less good about it. But to ask them to do something, they're already doing too many things as it is.

Issues that Challenge Success

While there were many factors that contributed to the success of Focused Monitoring in each district, there were a couple of factors that continue to hamper or create challenges for districts to implement the process successfully: buy-in and resistance.

Staff buy-in. Many district coordinators reported that buy-in suffered when the awareness level of Focused Monitoring was low in a district or school site. Additionally, one administrator reported that buy-in became an issue when a new administrator stepped in and deemed some programs more important than others. This, of course, influenced the direction of each program at this school site. In the case where a FM team was not very cohesive or non-existent, or the superintendent not supportive, the FMP and its progress could have been compromised. For example:

> I think one of the challenges for us was just the awareness level. It was changing a belief system, not a belief system, but a mindset that had been in practice for so long, "us and them". "Special ed isn't our problem." So that was one of the biggest challenges for us is how to tackle that and how to move the agenda. You can't include kids if you don't have the right mindset. That's been one of our biggest challenges. Most general ed teachers feel that's what the special ed teacher is there for. "I've never had to deal with special ed students so why should I have to deal with it now. It's not my problem." For us that was really a big, big challenge and it still continues at some sites. We have to do that. That was one of the biggest challenges… The biggest challenge was the change in the mindset. To accept systems changes is a big challenge and it was for us. The mindset and the thought of doing something different after so many years of doing it one way. That was one of our big challenges.
>
> The challenge was bringing awareness to the general ed population, to tell teachers, "These guys are IEP's, but they're also your responsibility. They're not just special ed's babies. They're your babies, too. You need to make sure that these goals are being met, and that the kids are working on it as well." There was a change of thinking. We had to make them think differently.
>
> We had some trouble getting the administration from [School Site X], to buy in. That was an issue. But I guess the people are coming around now. They have a new specialist coordinator. They are involved and they have bought in. But they haven't provided their staff with the kind of training that the other two sites have. Okay? The special classes that are using the reading programs have bought in. Those representatives are very loyal they contribute. But, the whole school has not taken advantage of the training as the other two schools have. To me that is a negative, honestly.

One FM district coordinator reflected on the benefits of nurturing buy-in in a district:

> Well, of course, you have to have everyone sold to it. So if we all of a sudden have all the principals leave, and the next person comes in and goes, "Hmm, it's not that big a thing," you've got a problem. It's taken me a while to get everyone motivated towards one direction.

Resistance. Many district coordinators commented on the level of resistance that existed in their district as a result of FM. One district coordinator reported that resistance tended to occur as a result of fear in and difficulty with changing well-established mindsets. Once district personnel began to buy in to the process as a result of being better informed, resistance decreased.

> The greatest obstacle has been the, I hate to use the word resistance, but almost a reluctance to get this completed. When you have a district that is having difficulties in other areas as well it was very important to clean this up. It was difficult to get the site people to understand that it's their responsibility. It's difficult to fix all of the special ed from the district office. You have to have the buy in from the site administration and the general education staff, which continues to be a struggle. I will be very honest with you. Teachers are used to doing certain things in their way. It's very hard for them to understand about collaboration and having other people in their classroom, to be involved in IEPs and fill out forms and talk about how the kid is progressing in the class. We've made a lot of progress. We've also had those challenges. You have those people that are entrenched in the present system. They are very hesitant to change.

> It's a personality…. I think when you study management it's "That's how we used to always do it." People get comfortable with that. You need something to wake people up. To get them to understand that the way you always did it is not necessarily correct. You have to pave the way by not forcing it on people. You have to be a good sales person and a good manager, to be very honest with you, to get the change to be very smooth. People are going to be very reluctant when you throw this at them. If it's presented in a way that it's good for kids and it's good for the program, it's good for parents, then it is a buy in. It took two, two and a half years and there's still some ways to go.

> Some of the challenges that are there primarily have to do with a fear of change, and with new leadership that has not had experience with this, that has no history in it. Those kinds of things are the real challenge areas. And maintaining enthusiasm, too, has got to be part of it. I've got to be coming back regularly – the district "I" needs to be part of this process. And I do insert myself. I attend some of the staff meetings and so forth, just so I'm available for questions and to remind them of resources and so forth… As long as we have these

institutes that we can send people to, there is a natural progression of enthusiasm. You go to the institute, you come home, you're enthusiastic, the rest of the world gets in the way, and pretty soon you go down, and then somebody says, "You want to go to another institute?" and the enthusiasm builds again. That has been the main vehicle for maintaining enthusiasm. It's not the only one, but it's been the main one.

There's still a resistance of having even special ed kids on campus. It still goes back to that, no matter where you go. If you have a regular ed teacher teaching science, and they've been told they must cover this material, along with the curriculum, and you bring a kid in who's cognitively dysfunctional, and say, "Okay, we want him to be taught the same curriculum, and be the same as the rest of the kids, and by the way, you're going to do it with all the rest of your kids," sometimes they're not as happy with that child as they are with others.

These issues that emerged from the district administrator interviews, buy-in and resistance, added further support to the open-ended survey data with respect to challenges. Team members will need to address these challenges if FMP philosophy and progress is to continue in their districts.

(3) Will Focused Monitoring Efforts be sustained?

To answer this question, a variety of data sources were used, including survey data and the district administrator interview analysis.

Survey Scale Analysis

The scale, *Sustainability*, was used to determine respondents' views on how Focused Monitoring efforts will be sustained after *Year Three*. The *Sustainability* scale focuses on aspects of sustainability in districts' ability to maintain compliance with special education regulations, and progress and improvements in student outcomes as the pilot program comes to an end.

In Table 11 is presented the weighted mean of the *Sustainability* scale (refer to Appendix D for items related to scale). As can be seen, survey participants agreed with the items in the scale, such as the idea of making a commitment to continue the Focused Monitoring approach to improving student outcomes and the necessity of continued contact with a state consultant.

Table 11

Average Rating on *Sustainability* Survey Scale

Survey Scale	n	*M (SD)*
Sustainability	13	3.19 (.63)

Note. Responses were based on a Likert-type scale: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *agree*, 4 = *strongly agree*.

Open-ended Survey Data

Survey participants were asked if FMP should be continued, based on their experiences. Overwhelmingly, they said "yes," but for different reasons. Several themes emerged from their responses including the need to continue to address student needs, monitoring progress that has been made, and the professional development opportunities that were provided through FMP activities.

Addressing students needs. While district team members reported much success with respect to student improvement, they also suggested that students still have many needs that need to be addressed. Work on tackling the KPIs would continue in order to improve student test scores, literacy, graduation rates, as well as hiring qualified teachers and including special education students more in the general education curriculum.

Improvement-monitoring activities. District team members felt they made strides in program and personnel improvement. However, they reported the need to follow up and ensure that these improvements continued in the right direction. Information and data needs to be gathered in order to check up on programs. Many participants reported that feedback on the data was important in determining issues that could be problematic and practices that were working for district personnel and students. Also, after three years for FMP, participants report that the FMP has not yet been internalized by the district personnel. In order for personnel to be in tune with the process and outcomes, the process should continue.

Professional Development Opportunities. Many participants reported the opportunity for personal and professional growth and believed that FMP should continue in order that they would continue to have these professional development opportunities. Growth came from the ability to participate in district- and state-run programs and institutes that focused on improving collaboration or teacher training. Often, it was

reported that these opportunities would not have occurred for most of the district personnel if it had not been through FM funding or improvement mission.

Activities that ought to be continued

Survey participants reported many kinds of activities that they believed should be continued. Themes emerged from the many activities and are discussed below.

Team collaboration. In the above instances, team collaboration was seen as a successful component of FMP as well as a challenge. Team collaboration was a fluid process that cannot be perfected in a short amount of time yet it was beneficial to all who were involved. Participants reported wanting to continue team collaboration activities, such as communication between special and general education staff, collaboration between school sites and district offices, and between site principals and their staff.

Program implementation. One theme generated from the list of activities included continuing specific programs that were believed to be beneficial to the students. These programs included literacy and inclusion. As was detailed in the previous interview analysis section, district data demonstrated marked improvements in special education and RSP students' performance with respect to certain aspects of literacy (e.g., decoding, fluency, and comprehension). Also, efforts to include students in the general education classroom seemed to be just as beneficial to the teacher as it was to the students who were included.

Professional development. Again, participants reported wanting to continue with professional development activities. Specifically, they suggested workshops and leadership conferences/institutes, technical assistance and teacher training were worthy activities to continue.

These survey participants' comments were further supported by what many district coordinators reported in their interviews.

District Coordinator Interview Analysis

Interview analyses revealed many concerns and hopes for sustaining the improvements in student outcomes and compliance, as well as district participation and cooperation, in the future. Several areas emerged from the resulting analysis: reflections on challenges, issues of sustainability, future and ongoing needs, and

reflections on lasting practices. Each of these areas contain themes that have been illuminated to demonstrate these concerns and hopes for the future.

Issues of Sustainability

Throughout *Year Three*, districts considered how they could maintain Focused Monitoring efforts. Several district coordinators reported on their sustainability "brainstorming" meetings, which resulted in three main streams of thought: incentives, funding, and state consultant services. Overall, many districts reflected upon their district's infrastructure and on sustaining the support networks that were developed during the FM process. One district coordinator provided an elaborate explanation of her thoughts on sustaining the district's improvements:

> We talked a lot in the ones that we've been to about systems change. How to go through that process? That's been helpful. I think for us sustainability is a critical element. When you have a systems change, which we are going through, how can leadership help sustain that and provide the ongoing staff development to keep that light lit? Does that make sense? That's a real big area of concern for us and we've been looking for ways to better deal with that. Our grant officially ends this year. The grant money has helped us to network, to put some things in place and try some different positions and things, but sustaining that as leadership moving that… along is a big question for us… One of the discussions that we had toward the end of last year was sustainability. One of the things that we decided that we needed to do was look at the structure of our team. In order to keep that vital we needed to make sure that we had our team in place. Part of what we started with this year was a restructuring of some of our team members and making sure that the state quotas that we didn't have, we brought on board this year. That was one step that we put in place this year that will be critical to us keeping that going on. One of the key things is dependant on the KPIs. We're going to need the support from those various factions to continue. Some had to deal with the inclusions and curriculum concerns. We added a curriculum specialist to our team to be an ongoing member so that we could have that perspective and address some issues relative to inclusion and some of the standards. That was a critical thing. We put those people in place this year to get them on line and on board and help take a more active leadership role. They meet in other arenas where these issues can be addressed. That was one of the strategies. We said that as a leadership team we needed to be able to tap other resources because our district is so large. So if we bring those people in, then in their arenas they can help drive the agenda. That was one critical strategy.

Incentives to keep **focused** *on Focused Monitoring*. FM districts shared some of their incentives for continuing the FM process in their district. Many of these incentives were based on the time and people investments to create program and systemic changes.

Districts were motivated to sustain this progress and growth, and several district coordinators vowed not to revert back to a time when we were non-compliant.

> The superintendent, the assistant superintendent and myself and the principals, we all know that we work way too hard. We had state people, federal people and a lot of people looking at our programs and verification and we've come too far to let this fall apart. There will be continued support for us to meet at least once or twice a semester, just to make sure that we're humming. To make sure that district issues are being covered. That special ed is not neglected. I truly think that this leadership team will go on, whether we get support and continued funding.

> What's nice, our goal for focused monitoring was to make sure we were in compliance and make sure that we're increasing our scores. We've done that. We don't want to stop that. We'll be in big trouble if we do.

> I think that the whole focus on reading and literacy is really big time and has come to the forefront. It has expanded past the little focus-monitoring pilot. It has gone district wide. It certainly is the theme and is heavily promoted in Local District D. From the top down, I think that as a district we are really preaching to get kids back in to the least restrictive environments and moving them into general education. To the best of their ability, there is a whole thrust/movement… I think that now, because the district has structured reading programs at the elementary level and they have for kids that score at a certain level in middle and senior high. When we write IPs the way in which the goals are written, are up to the standards. The standard for all general education kids. We have the same expectation for all kids in the district, just with different supports and modifications. In compliance, where I work, I do tons of training city wide about that. We promote that all the time.

Funding. FM districts discussed concerns regarding funding if the program ended. Several districts discussed cooperative plans to pull funding sources together from different programs, while other districts were considering grants as a funding source. Regardless of how or if districts were able to locate funding to support the process in their district, several district coordinators reported that participation in the FM process has resulted in changing the way their districts currently do their business. That is, FM components were built into their planning process.

> The concern that we still have to grapple with is the ongoing staff development. We're trying to redirect and guide sites to build that in systemically at their level. We won't be able to support that without the grant funds as we have in the past years. We've taken a forefront to say, "Here's an opportunity. We'd like to save the team representative from these schools. We need them to become more actively involved." So we've had discussions on what are

some of the staff development concerns and what are some resources that you have at your site. We've talked about cooperatively using funds. Some schools have Title Ones and other funding sources. But to encourage the sites as they build their plans, to consider that component of ongoing staff development and those needs as they plan. That is something that monetarily we won't be able to help and support. The other thing that we used our budget for, and another thing that's coming up as a result of collaborating and inclusion, is time to plan, time to talk and discuss. Of course that's a big issue too. We were able to support it through our monies. We were able to pay for release time and some time for teacher's to meet and discuss the issues and for our group to meet. That's an area of concern that we still need to address. We're trying to refocus back to the sites. We're looking district wide at some things that we can do to too. We have a director of classified and certificative support and that person is also on our team. We brought them on and they deal with BTSA and 1193 monies and things. Now we can start discussing how we can complement those funds to achieve some of the goals. Those are all some of the things that we're still continuing to discuss and try to put in place so that this five year plan moves towards a systems change. After a time it won't be like it's a Focused Monitoring thing. It's a district wide thing that's systematically built into how we do this and this. It's a regular part of the schools and their agenda too. That's the discussion that we're having. We have to work towards that. It's a mindset change. Those are some of the real hard questions we deal with as far as sustainability. We've pushed the agenda from the standpoint of going out to all the sites and meeting with their collaborative team. We are bringing that back and giving a list of concerns. We can identify what they are so that we can tie them to sustainability and then start looking at a question of how do we sustain this? What are some ideas and just brainstorm? Those are the kind of discussions we have. We try to look at the resources that we have. How can we address this issue within what we have?

I would love to continue this process. Maybe not in as expensive a mode. It's been very nice to have $75,000 in a district this size to accomplish these things. I think that I could continue with the positive direction – let me back up. It can't continue in any significant level without some support, some fiscal support or an in-kind kind of thing. In other words, if we can get some staff development that we can use, if we can find some ways to send teachers to other school sites to visit things. It takes money. Without that, it's not going to – I think it highly unlikely that it's going to continue with any dynamic at all. But with some sort of support, whether it be grants that we write for or however, I think that we can continue with the same level of enthusiasm and progress that we've seen so far, especially in this last eight to ten months.

CDE and state consultant support. In order for the FMP to continue, district coordinators talked about various needs, including continued support from the CDE and the state consultants as well as continuing the semi-annual CalSTAT conferences.

The majority of district coordinators acknowledged the need for continued support from the CDE, especially through the state consultant. Several district coordinators reported that continued contact with the state consultant is important, but that it was not necessary to have an intense level of communication and involvement. Rather, just having the consultants available to answer questions regarding compliance issues or to point out resources and training seemed suitable enough for the majority of districts. For example,

> I know they're busy, but having that consultant for me personally, helped change the perception. I think it's out there that the state just makes these mandates and they don't see what's going on. They aren't actively involved in what's going on at the site. From that standpoint it was nice to have them there seeing what the sites are struggling with. To have that dialog, that sensibility I think was important. It would be nice if it could be continued. I know that's not realistic, but that was I think a key thing helping keep issues out on the forefront. I think that gave the state person also a perspective of some of the things that we at the site and districts are struggling with as far as misinterpretation. I didn't see that as someone telling us how to run this. I saw it as a consultant and a resource for us as we worked through this process. From that standpoint I will welcome that resource and that accessibility. I think that helps change the process that's out there.

> The state consultant is a resource, and you only need resources when you need resources. You only need heat on in the house when it gets cold. As long as they're there and available, that's the level of contact that I need. Now, I need resources, as I said at the beginning of this interview. I don't need $75,000, but I need resources. And if that's the source through which those resources are going to be developed, then I need to have more contact with her, whether that be in the form of regional meetings or local meetings. It's kind of hard for her. I know she's got a whole bunch of other districts that she's going to work on this year. But she's there, I have her phone number, and she's there when we need her.

> I think there needs to be follow-up. I think they need to send CDE people back into the districts, to do follow-up. To see where you are, and where you're headed, or the whole thing's going to die.

> I think it needs to be at the same level that it has been now. That he meets with us on an ongoing basis. Maybe not every month, but a check-in every other month. Also, I think if we can continue the committee, or the Focused Monitoring committee, that he should be in attendance. I see it as, he's going away and then everybody just saying, "Okay, this is over with, we don't have to do it any more."

> [Our state consultant] says that she is going to be there for us whenever we call. I believe that she will. We have established a wonderful link. I don't perceive that would go away.

Even though I know that we are not going to use her as much because it won't be her role. I feel as though we have a wonderful contact that is supportive and will always guide us in the directions we need to be guided. If we ask her questions about how to proceed in certain arenas… I feel that she is a wonderful supportive contact for us.

[We'd like to have the state consultant visit] two times a year. And for instance, as we talked about administration leadership, were another superintendent to come in who didn't believe in inclusion or something, which is not unforeseeable, we need to have that ongoing guidance from the state department.

I think even once a semester would be sufficient for them to do a spot check to see that all of our programs are working. To see that we're compliant and our KPIs are being addressed. My office will always maintain records with our KPIs. Just to review how we're doing on our KPIs would be adequate.

Earlier in this report, training on various teaching practices and leadership was discussed. The training that seemed to have the greatest effect on districts was the semi-annual CalSTAT Institute, which amongst other components provided leadership training and technical support for FM districts. In addition, this was where model sites presented their successes, and where FM districts were able to meet and share ideas with both model sites and other FM districts. All of the FM districts that attended these institutes provided positive feedback and the desire for CalSTAT resources as well as their institutes to continue even after the FM pilot program ends.

Continue tapping into the technical support from the CDE and CalSTAT. And keeping up with the compliance changes that are coming down from the state and Federal government.

Those leadership trainings have been helpful at looking at models, networking, sharing concerns and having an opportunity to bring some tools back to better implement that process in our district. We've found them valuable. It's also helped us to build teams at the site, collaborative teams, which have been a key mover and shaker.

These institutes provided FM districts with a forum to discuss relevant issues with other districts. They created connections with each other. Some of these connections shave continued past the dates of the institutes. These connections and relationships made at the institutes have provided districts opportunities to share and learn best practices (for systems change, inclusion, literacy, and behavioral interventions) from each other.

Reflections on Lasting Effects and Practices

The quotes provided below include district reflections on the overall lasting effects and practices that participation in the FM program has had on districts. The majority of districts participating in this component of the evaluation are represented in this section of the report. These quotes are a tribute to and indicative of the hard work that has occurred over the last three years:

> ***IEPs.*** The principals at the sites do their own self-audit of the program and then we at the district do an audit of the sites. This happens twice a year, once each semester. It really keeps us compliant. In all the issues that we look at, for example kids being appropriately placed is a good topic, we look at every single IEP. We look at kid's schedules and we make sure that they are in fact where they're supposed to be. If it says RSP English then they're in RSP English. Another good example would be services. Whether it's DIS counseling or speech and language or adaptive TE, if it says so on the IEP we look. We call the parent. We check with the child and see if they are, in fact, getting 30 minutes a week of counseling. They are. I think the verification process has helped us focus on those items that make us compliant.

> ***Data.*** This year I think the factors that have made the team successful is having data before us and having knowledge of the importance of this accountability and this accountability system. Understanding compliance and why it's so critical. Just truthfully having the state come in and say, "This is a problem. You need to correct it." Sometimes that's hard to hear, but that's what you need to hear to move the agenda along. Truthfully, that's what it took.

> ***Sharing information.*** I didn't come to a workability [conference] to have people shove professional products down my throat. I wanted to hear what things were happening that were good for kids… I was thinking, "There should be a bank, a way of sharing these [ideas]." I think that is what Focused Monitoring can also do. It can be a place where we share and learn.

> ***District support.*** I think a couple of factors. Support from the assistant superintendent and the superintendent. I think that was very important. That helped with site people. I didn't have to be sold. I'm the director of special education, but the support from upper management, the leadership from the district helped get the rest of the team to understand the important of this process. That's number one, the support. Number two we need to give credit to the sites as well. Everything ends up being at the teacher level and then finally to the student level. When the site administration internalized it and understood how important this was, it was able to get to the teachers. When we started meeting they always said, "Yes, we want to make sure we stay compliant. We want to make sure that we do the best we can. We want to make sure that we do all our mainstreaming and integration."

That's been the wonderful part. The fruit of this labor has been that it's gone to the teacher level and kids are benefiting from it.

Collaboration. When I'm talking about teams now, I'm back to my school site teams. I'm away from the district level original QAP Focused Monitoring team. Because it's those site level teams that are the ones that are going to effect the change, it's not a bunch of people sitting around a table trying to understand what systems change is.

Collaboration. I think the collaboration that has been developed. Again, it's the money available to release people and pay people for release time. The ability to provide training and in-service things they normally wouldn't get.

Collaboration. I think the goodwill of the team. Certainly my partner and co-lead, the school psychologist has been a really important factor. The team has shown a lot of goodwill and energy for change. Because four years ago they were the bane of the school. Everyone was mad at them because they had too many F's and they tied up the discipline department. Things were just terrible and through their efforts special education is not the wicked stepchild of the school. It is definitely a real viable part of the school population… In so many ways, inclusion worked. But not just of students but of special education staff. Two and a half years ago our special education staff was insular and isolated. Now they are curricular leaders. It has been the most amazing thing. The money has sent them out to be trained in cutting edge practices. They have come back and taken leadership roles in all of the core departments. They are members of all the core departments as well as literacy areas. They attend all meetings of every school wide working team. They are constantly out front.

Communication. Lots of discussion. People did not feel threatened in voicing their opinion or recommendations. We all have an equal vote. It was successful because there was a lot of collaboration and trust… I think the collaboration between general ed and special ed has really improved. The general ed taking some ownership for the special ed kids has really improved. And teacher awareness about students who have learning problems has improved.

Relationship-building. I think one of the best things is the underlying relationships that came out of this. If our staff and district work well together, it will reflect onto the students. People are happier and things go smoother on the campuses.

Model programs. I think as long as I'm able to continue to hear about things that are good for kids, I can go and find out more about it and bring it back to the district. Though Focused Monitoring, we have built programs… We have parents who embraced the program. One person from another district said, "That class is the hottest ticket in town!" They know how incredibly successful it is. It's a model that we can build upon. I think that as long as we have support from the state, we can do the programming.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This evaluation report focused on *Year Three* summative review of the Focused Monitoring Process (FMP). Findings described the participants' perceptions of the process as well as successes and challenges in terms of team processes and meeting goals established through the Quality Assurance Agreement (QAA). Due to the small sample size of respondents for the survey and interviews, any interpretation of the data should be treated cautiously. Rather, these findings provide a glimpse of trends occurring in the districts for this third year (2001-2002). Overall, participants' reactions to *Year Three* of FMP were positive, particularly with respect to the services provided by the state consultant, leadership team collaboration. Evaluation participants perceived a general success with respect to the improvement goals (i.e., student outcomes and compliance). Participants recognized their responsibility in implementing and monitoring the improvement efforts with respect to student outcomes. Also, they perceived themselves to be committed to continue these efforts in order to sustain improvements that have been made. However, there is the recognition that there are still many challenges and humps to get over (e.g., altering negative attitudes toward change, resistance, and lack of buy-in) if FMP efforts are going to remain a priority in these districts.

Three Year Overview

Over the last three years, the participating FM districts experienced a great challenge to improve the outcomes of students with disabilities as well as create changes within the districts to support these improvements. Some of the experiences were positive while others proved to be almost detrimental to the implementation of FMP in these districts. What follows are short summaries of the experiences these FM districts experienced for each year of the evaluation.

Year One (1999-2000) – The Planning Year

- **Funding and state support.** As incentive for participating in Focused Monitoring, districts received funding to support their improvement efforts and related activities. Furthermore, districts were assigned state consultants who were charged with the responsibility of providing information regarding the FMP and educational resources, aiding districts during the Verification Reviews and in the development of their QAAs, and meeting timelines.

- **Initial confusion.** Many district team members voiced concerns that what seemed like confusion at the state level was being transferred to the district level. That is, districts perceived the FMTA staff to be confused about the actual process of Focused Monitoring, definitions, timelines, and expectations for the districts. This confusion, in turn, was transferred to districts as many administrators explained their confusion about the FMP and how the Verification Review fit into it. Expectations from the CDE were not clearly communicated to the districts.

- **Late start.** The FMP was slated to begin in August 1999; however, due to delays at the state level with organizational issues and delivering funding to participating districts, some districts did not begin the process until December 1999, while other districts did not start until March 2000. Due to this late start date, districts had little time to prepare for and participate in the activities that would define FMP later: meetings with district personnel, choosing KPIs and planning improvement goals, conducting Verification Reviews and planning/implementing corrective actions based on the results of the Verification Reviews.

- **Verification reviews.** The Verification Review process was perceived to be very tedious. For two to three days, district staff (including teachers, directors, and assistant superintendents) was busy reviewing up to 50 student files and checking for compliance with a large questionnaire of special education and IDEA'97 regulations. While special education directors saw the value of compliance with special education regulations and understood the benefit of the Verification Review, there was a perception in the district that special education issues (and students) were separate from general education. This perception made it more difficult for others to see the value of researching systemic noncompliance issues and redressing them through corrective actions.

- **Initial improvements among staff.** Although there were several factors that seemed to impede the FMP process developing in these districts, there were noted improvements in other areas. For instance, interview and survey data demonstrated perceived improvements in communication and teamwork among district staff. Better relationships were building through the improved communication. However, these improvements were slow to occur as district personnel were still facing the challenge of changing negative attitudes towards special education and towards participation in the FMP.

- **QAA development and the KPIs.** In *Year One*, significant efforts were put forth into the development of the QAA. These included the development of goals to improve student outcomes and plans for achieving these goals. At the same time, districts were choosing the KPIs on which they wanted to focus.

Year Two (2000-2001) – Process Implementation

- **Lingering issues.** A few concerns and issues lingered into *Year Two*, including funding and time. District FM coordinators noted that FMP funding was not received in a timely manner and they were not sure why the funding was arriving late again. Through the interviews, districts mentioned that it was difficult to implement programs into the schools or to send teachers and other staff to professional development training because of the financial structure of their district. The financial structure of these districts required that the funding for programs and training exists prior to actually purchasing programs or sending staff away. Many times, program purchases and professional development opportunities had to wait for the funding to be in place. Time continued to be a concern during *Year Two*, particularly for implementing comprehensive training and professional development for teachers.

- **Improved communication between district and state.** There was a noted improvement in communication between the districts and state personnel. This was largely due to the consistency and timeliness of information. This also improved the perceptions of the CDE consultants. They were viewed as more knowledgeable about FMP and participating districts' issues. Collaboration was increasing in each of these districts, especially between the general and special education staff. As districts moved towards inclusion models, teachers, principals, and district administrators saw the importance of the increased collaboration to make inclusion successful.

- **Training.** In *Year Two*, all participating districts were provided with the opportunity to participate in leadership training. Prior to *Year Two*, only Facilitated Districts received this training opportunity.[4] In most districts, training was valued, particularly on systems change and leadership development. These trainings gave districts a different perspective regarding how personnel can work together to achieve their improvement goals. People saw each other as a valuable member of the district, particularly the district FM coordinator. This person was seen as a valuable resource due to the connection with and access to other district administrators and the CDE.

- **KPIs.** Three KPIs were consistently chosen: increasing literacy scores, increasing inclusion of special education students in the general education classroom, and increasing the percentage of fully-certificated staff. In some districts, there was the issue of collecting and interpreting data on specific improvement programs (e.g., literacy scores). A lack of specialized personnel to do this work contributed to the issue. There was a realization of the lack of standardization of data across school sites in one district such that the data could not be generalized to the whole district.

- **Commitment to FMP.** Commitment by the staff to the improvement goals and systems change established through FMP was seen as critical to the FMP

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[4] In *Year One*, districts were categorized as Facilitated or Collaborative. Facilitated districts only received training. In *Year Two*, Collaborative districts were reclassified as Facilitated districts, thus giving them the same training opportunities as the other districts has received prior.

functioning smoothly. There was a perceived issue that staff, especially the superintendent, was not too committed to the FMP reformations occurring in the districts. The challenge was to increase buy-in from staff at all levels of the district.

- **Verification reviews.** The Verification Review was still perceived as a laborious process. At the same time, there was the recognition that districts were systemically noncompliant on items pertaining to service delivery for special education students. This process, as opposed to the California Compliance Review, allowed staff to do an in depth analysis of their noncompliant areas and design corrective actions to address them. In many cases, this resulted in a new Individualized Education Plan (IEP) form that was "user-friendly" and containing all the required elements to ensure compliance. In other cases, a manual was developed for teachers to use when developing a student's IEP. Finally, there was an increasing wave of realization of the importance of always striving for compliance rather than deal with the negative actions that often result from noncompliance (e.g., litigation, fines, etc.).

- **Progress.** The interview and survey data revealed that progress in district-chosen KPIs was starting to occur in *Year Two*. In many cases, progress was slow, but it was being made. District personnel were using multiple resources to attract qualified teachers to their districts. Funding was used to buy literacy programs and send teachers to literacy training. There were noted gains in literacy scores from district administrator and team member accounts.

Year Three (2001-2002) – Sustaining the Process

- **Increased collaboration.** From the interview and survey data, district team members reflected on the increasing amount of collaboration that was occurring in the district. This collaboration was occurring between special and general educators, between teachers and principals, between school sites and the district office, and between the district and state consultants. Many team members remarked at the way collaboration was moving the district agenda forward in a positive direction. Through collaborating and sharing with each other, district personnel were able to achieve certain goals and plan for others. The collaboration between people in various positions was a part of the systems change that was occurring in these districts.

- **State consultants.** In *Year Three*, perceptions about the state consultants were as positive as the previous year. State consultants proved to be helpful resources to the districts, particularly in the areas of providing information on model programs, professional development, and funding sources and opportunities. Several district coordinators depicted them as good problem solvers and motivators to help push their districts along. In *Year Three*, districts grew to depend less on the state consultant for information regarding the QAA and timelines as they became stronger and capable to handle it on their own. However, district FM coordinators overwhelmingly stated the need to continue

the relationship with their state consultants if only to explore their knowledge of helpful resources.

- **Leadership institutes.** Many of the participating FM districts participated in leadership institutes provided by CalSTAT. These leadership institutes provided an environment where districts all over California could meet and share with each other resources and knowledge that would aid in addressing and improving student outcomes. At every institute were school sites/districts that were chosen to participate as "model sites" because they demonstrated changes in systems, leadership styles, and curriculum that resulted in success for their students and personnel. In *Year Three*, several FM districts participated as model sites. They were able to share their experiences, successful and unsuccessful, with other districts regarding literacy, inclusion, and collaboration. From the interviews, coordinators reported that it was a very rewarding and successful experience for them to be able to share their knowledge and experiences. Other district coordinators reported that these leadership institutes provided them with opportunities to build connections with other district personnel, and experiences regarding the different strands of learning in which they could participate.

- **Lingering challenges.** In *Year Three*, district personnel reported that negative attitudes and buy-in from others in the district continued to be challenges to making systems change and improving student outcomes successful. Special education was still being perceived as the responsibility of special education teachers and administrators. Also, there was still a negative perception of the FMP and a resistance to the changes that were occurring as a result of its implementation. While several district coordinators reported that school and district staffs were changing their opinions about special education and inclusion, these continue to be challenges that district personnel must address.

- **Continuing progress.** From the interview and survey data, team members reported improvements in the outcomes of their special education students as well as the chosen KPIs. Lessons they learned from the previous years regarding program implementation and professional development aided their progression in *Year Three*. Literacy scores were increasing for special education students. Inclusion practices were starting to have positive impact on student outcomes and teacher perceptions. School districts were hiring qualified teachers as a result of holding or participating in job fairs. Furthermore, compliance with special education regulations was occurring, a sign that district corrective actions were in place and working to ensure compliance. Monitoring of these successes was occurring to ensure sustainability of the progress and improvements that had been made.

Recommendations

These results, highlighted in the section Overall District Trends, are based on data collected during the third year of the three-year FMP pilot program. Several

recommendations can be drawn from the findings in this report. While some of these were recommendations made in, and may have been addressed since, *Year Two*, they remain reminders of worthwhile activities to continue if FMP is to have its intended impact on student outcomes, district practices, and improved compliance.

- **Continuous communication between the CDE/Special Education Division (SED) and district personnel.** The relationship between the CDE/SED and school districts has played an important role in helping districts to improve their practices and service delivery to special education students. Communication between these two agencies is critical and should remain intact, particularly when it regards information about innovative practices or changes in education regulations. While district participants perceived improvements in their district KPIs and service delivery models, they also enumerated several issues that could present challenges to sustaining their improvements. Conversations regarding sustainability, and mechanisms to sustain improvements, continues to be a recommendation from the previous year.

- **Model school sites.** In *Year Three*, several FMP districts participated as model sites at CalSTAT leadership institutes, sharing with other districts the practices that worked in their own. Model school sites continue to be valued as reported in the interviews and open-ended survey questions. Evaluation participants reported the need to continue conversations with model school sites. These conversations occur at conferences, like CalSTAT, or through visiting school districts and sites where innovative practices are being used. The CDE should continue to provide districts with mechanisms by which district personnel are able to connect with model districts through financial support and constant communication.

- **CDE support for FM districts.** The analyses from the district coordinator interviews and team member surveys demonstrated that districts fall along a continuum of success. Some districts have made substantial progress in systems change with district personnel as well as improvements with their special education populations. Other districts are slowly making improvements or have found the systems change aspect more challenging to implement with their staff. While these districts may require continued support (in the form of funding, professional development, and state consultant services), it is not suggested that the more "successful" districts stop receiving the same support. Rather, these "successful" districts could participate as a type of support (e.g., model FM districts) to those districts that continue to experience challenges along the way to improvements with CDE support. Just as the model sites provided rich experiences and stories of success, and failure, these "model FM districts" could provide experiences and training that would be more meaningful to other FM districts.

- **Increasing district personnel commitment to FMP.** Evaluation participants reported the need to get more buy-in from district personnel not on the

leadership team. Many of these people are the teachers who implement programs that have a direct impact on student achievement and outcomes. While the model of communication within the district shifts from top-down to round table, more efforts should be made to gradually increase non-team personnel participation in decision-making processes through informational meetings about the FMP mission, improved methods of disseminating information, and the coordination and scheduling of meetings.

- **Training on latest practices and programs.** Evaluation findings continue to suggest that team members recognize districts' needs for ongoing training on the latest practices and innovative programs. Models of collaboration and inclusion, and teacher training in literacy were reported to be highly successful and popular in these districts. Therefore, the CDE and districts should continue to work together in order to keep district personnel informed about conferences, trainings, and practices that suit the particular needs of each district such that improved student outcomes and service delivery is assured.

- **Funding for professional development.** Related to the above recommendation is the continued need for sources of funding. Evaluation participants reported the need for funding to buy substitute teacher time, pay travel expenses, and buy programs that actually work with special populations of children. While it is known, and expected, that funding sources get redirected to other areas of need, it remains an important issue particularly if improvement efforts are to be sustained for the long term. The CDE should continue its efforts to inform districts about funding sources, particularly when it is available through the state or other governmental agencies, to help districts in their quest to maintain quality in their service delivery and continually improve on their successes as a result of FMP.

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Appendix A

Survey Scale Items

Team Effectiveness

11. The leadership training on team process and collaboration has improved the organizational structure of my district.

12. My district could benefit from more training in the area of team/capacity building.

13. I am confident that the FM team will continue to put to use the ideas behind team/capacity building learned from the leadership training.

14. The FM team works effectively together.

15. The superintendent in my district is an active team participant in the FM process.

16. The principals in my district are active team participants in the FM process.

17. Special education teachers in my district are active team participants in the FM process.

18. General education teachers in my district are active team participants in the FM process.

19. Team members carry out tasks or activities related to FM outside of team meetings.

20. Most members contribute to making planning decisions.

39. My district would have made similar improvements in our goals without FM.

41. The FM process has increased collaboration between special education and general education.

44. There is increased communication between teachers and principals as a result of FM.

45. There is increased communication between school sites and the district administration as a result of FM.

Improvement Efforts

21. The FM team uses the data from the KPIs to make planning decisions.

22. The KPI data is useful for evaluating the district's progress in improving overall student outcomes (general and special education).

23. Data has been/is being collected to check for improvement on selected KPIs.

24. The team oversees the improvement plan.

25. The goals of the improvement plan are being met.

26. I am implementing new special education practices that have been identified by the team.

27. Overall, the planning process in my district is effective.

28. Student record files are monitored or checked for compliance on a periodic basis.

29. As a result of the Verification Review, site administrators have become more involved in monitoring compliance at their sites.

30. Presently, the district's student record files are compliant with IDEA '97 guidelines.

31. The verification review still is not any more beneficial to this district than the coordinated compliance review.

37. My district will continue FM activities without continued monetary support.

38. The FM process has helped our district improve our KPIs.

40. The FM process has contributed to improved special education service delivery.

42. The reform efforts that have been undertaken as a part of FM have been successful.

43. Compliance with IDEA '97 guidelines have improved as a result of the FM process.

State Consultant Services

32. The CDE FM consultant(s) either visit or are in contact with our district often enough to be effective.

33. In general, the CDE FM consultant has effectively answered questions from team members about the FM process.

34. The services provided by the CDE FM consultant for the improvement of compliance with IDEA '97 are useful.

35. Overall, the services provided by the CDE FM consultant are useful for the implementation of FM.

Accountability

46. The FM team is responsible for making necessary program changes in accordance with the district's QAA.

47. At the district level, the FM team is responsible for ensuring that the school site(s) is in compliance with the QAA.

48. At the site level, the administrators and teachers are responsible for complying with the QAA.

49. The FM team is responsible for developing ways to improve the district's selected KPIs.

Sustainability

36. My district could benefit from continued services by the CDE FM consultant once the state's pilot program ends this year.

50. The FM team has made a commitment to continue meeting on district issues once the state's pilot program has ended.

51. To continue district efforts with the FM process, ongoing communication with a state consultant is critical.

52. The FM approach will continue to be used to address KPI improvement efforts once the state's pilot project has ended.

Appendix B

Survey Demographic Analysis

The following pages provide descriptive analyses according to district demographics, including: experience, community type, district size, district type, and information about team composition. For each of these areas, multivariate tests were conducted on the following scales: *Team Effectiveness, Improvement Efforts, State Consultant Services, Accountability,* and *Sustainability.*

Represented Positions on Focused Monitoring Team

Types of positions were recoded into a dichotomous variable: "special education-related" positions and "non-special education-related" positions. Special education related positions included the special education director, special education teachers, and SELPA representatives. Non-special education related positions included all others, including the superintendent, general education teachers, and building or site administrators. Multivariate tests of significance were used to examine differences between these two types of positions on the survey scales; no significant differences between participants in special education positions and participants in non-special education positions resulted. Table B1 displays the mean ratings per scale by position type. In general, all survey participants held positive perceptions on the items that made up each of the scales.

Table B1

Mean Scale Rating by Position Type [a]

Scale	Position type	n	*M (SD)*
TE	non-special ed.	32	3.16 (.49)
	special education	41	3.06 (.45)
IE	non-special ed.	32	3.29 (.38)
	special education	40	3.19 (.46)
SCS	non-special ed.	29	3.42 (.61)
	special education	39	3.29 (.74)
ACC	non-special ed.	28	3.37 (.46)
	special education	39	3.13 (.47)
SUS	non-special ed.	32	3.34 (.55)
	special education	40	3.24 (.68)

Note. TE = team effectiveness; IE = improvement efforts; SCS = state consultant services; ACC = accountability; and SUS = sustainability

[a] Data not included in this analysis was treated as missing data.

Level of Experience in District[5]

The average amount of experience in the sample was 11.59 years (SD = 9.67). Figure B1 breaks down the years of experience across the 13 districts as reported by the respondents.

[5] In order to compare the frequency of respondents in the several categories of experience (in district or position), the reader is asked to refer to the California Department of Education Focused Monitoring Process Evaluation: Progress Indicators from *Year One* to *Year Two.*
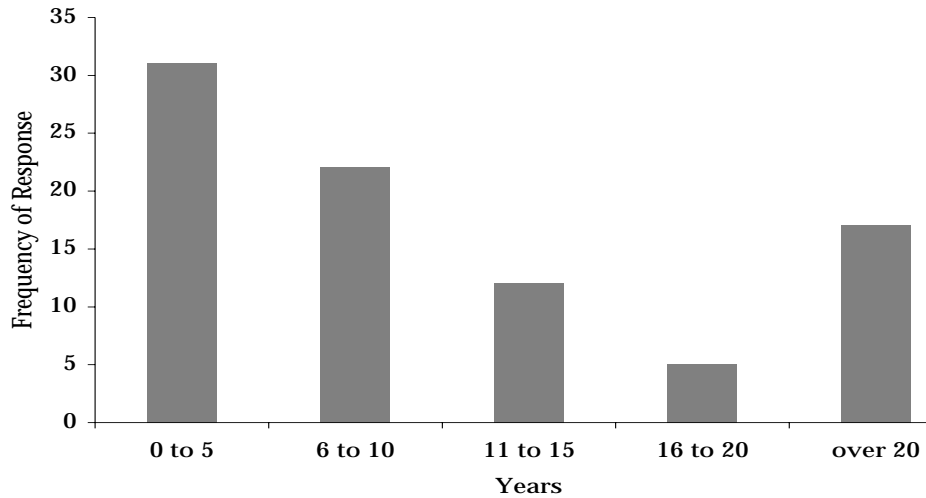
Figure B1. Comparison of survey participants' years of experience in district.

The number of years a person has worked in the district was re-coded into a dichotomous variable: 0 – 5 years and more than five years. Multivariate tests of significance for differences on the scales based on number of years of experience in the district showed no significant results (see Table B2). Participants held positive perceptions of the Focused Monitoring process irrespective of their levels of experience in the district.

Table B2

Mean Scale Differences by Experience in the District [a]

Scale	Experience	n	*M (SD)*
TE	0-5 years	29	3.23 (.09)
	6+ years	48	3.06 (.07)
IE	0-5 years	29	3.33 (.09)
	6+ years	48	3.18 (.07)
SCS	0-5 years	29	3.43 (.13)
	6+ years	48	3.26 (.10)
ACC	0-5 years	29	3.22 (.10)
	6+ years	48	3.17 (.08)
SUS	0-5 years	29	3.24 (.12)
	6+ years	48	3.20 (.09)

Note. TE = team effectiveness; IE = improvement efforts; SCS = state consultant services; ACC = accountability; and SUS = sustainability.

[a] Data not included in this analysis was treated as missing data.

Level of Experience in Current Position

The average amount of experience in one's position was almost 6 years (M = 5.98, SD = 5.07). The years of experience in one's position across the 13 districts as reported by the respondents is shown in Figure B2. It is not clear whether or not these frequencies reflect new team members who did not participate in *Year One* or *Year Two* Focused Monitoring activities.
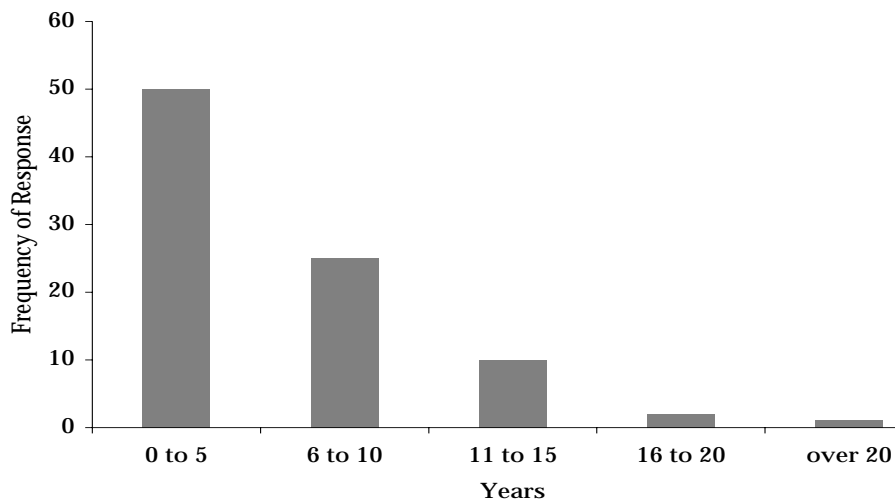

Figure B2. Comparison of survey participants' years of experience in position.

The number of years a person has worked in the current position was re-coded into a dichotomous variable: 0 – 5 years and more than five years. Multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) tests were conducted to compare the two groups in this new variable in terms of their level of agreement on each of the survey scales. Again, no significant differences resulted. Table B3 displays the mean scale ratings by experience in current position and year. Participants held positive perceptions of the items within each scale.

Table B3

Mean Scale Differences by Experience in Current Position [a]

Scale	Experience	n	*M (SD)*
TE	0-5 years	44	3.16 (.07)
	6+ years	33	3.07 (.08)
IE	0-5 years	44	3.31 (.07)
	6+ years	33	3.14 (.08)
SCS	0-5 years	44	3.42 (.11)
	6+ years	33	3.19 (.12)
ACC	0-5 years	44	3.25 (.08)
	6+ years	33	3.11 (.09)
SUS	0-5 years	44	3.26 (.09)
	6+ years	33	3.15 (.11)

Note. TE = team effectiveness; IE = improvement efforts; SCS = state consultant services; ACC = accountability; and SUS = sustainability.

[a] Data not included in this analysis was treated as missing data.

School District Community Differences

The effect of type of community was tested on the five survey scales. [6] Five separate one-way Analysis of Variance tests were conducted for each of the scales. There was no significant main effect of type of community on any of the scales. Participants rated items in each of the scales favorably. Table B4 displays the means and differences for each scale by type of community.

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[6] Weighting the mean scores for each district resulted in a total sample n of 13, the number of districts. For this and subsequent analyses, the number of districts rather than the number of individuals is used.

Table B4

Mean Scale Rating by Type of Community

Scale	Type of community	n	*M (SD)*
TE	rural	5	3.15 (.12)
	suburban	3	3.10 (.16)
	urban	5	2.97 (.69)
IE	rural	5	3.12 (.19)
	suburban	3	3.28 (.11)
	urban	5	3.18 (.38)
SCS	rural	5	3.34 (.13)
	suburban	3	3.42 (.56)
	urban	5	3.09 (.79)
ACC	rural	5	3.06 (.39)
	suburban	3	3.20 (.01)
	urban	5	3.33 (.49)
SUS	rural	5	3.49 (.49)
	suburban	3	3.39 (.24)
	urban	5	2.90 (.87)

Note. TE = team effectiveness; IE = improvement efforts; SCS = state consultant services; ACC = accountability; and SUS = sustainability.

Although there were no significant effects, one can see that the overall trend was a positive perception of items on the scales.

School District Size Differences

The variable, total number of teachers was used as an indicator of district size. This variable was categorized into a dichotomous variable: small districts (1-500 teachers) and large districts (more than 500 teachers). Five separate *t*-tests were run on the effect of type of community on the survey scales. There were no differences between small and large school districts on team members' perceptions of items in each scale. Overall, participants were positive regardless of the size of the school. The mean ratings for each scale are presented in Table B5.

Table B5

Mean Scale Rating by District Size

Scale	District Size	n	*M (SD)*
TE	small	8	3.04 (.71)
	large	5	3.07 (.14)
IE	small	8	3.27 (.33)
	large	5	3.10 (.19)
SCS	small	8	3.23 (.80)
	large	5	3.24 (.28)
ACC	small	8	3.38 (.51)
	large	5	3.07 (.18)
SUS	small	8	3.06 (1.00)
	large	5	3.31 (.33)

Note. TE = team effectiveness; IE = improvement efforts; SCS = state consultant services; ACC = accountability; and SUS = sustainability. District size was based on the number of teachers working within the district. Small districts contained 500 teachers or less. Large districts contained more than 500 teachers.

School District Differences

School districts were categorized into districts that were unified school districts, strictly elementary school districts, and districts that were strictly high school districts. Five separate one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests of significance were performed to determine any differences between participants of these three groups and their perceptions on the scales. There were no significant differences among the three types of school districts. While participants from elementary school districts were slightly less positive than participants from the other types of school districts Table B6 displays the mean rating for each scale by district type and year.

Table B6

Mean Scale Rating by District Type

Scale	District type	n	M (SD)
TE	Unified	5	3.03 (.18)
	Elementary	3	2.58 (--)[a]
	High School	5	3.24 (.24)
IE	Unified	5	3.03 (.21)
	Elementary	3	3.13 (--)[a]
	High School	5	3.30 (.29)
SCS	Unified	5	3.19 (.43)
	Elementary	3	2.79 (--)[a]
	High School	5	3.44 (.19)
ACC	Unified	5	3.08 (.38)
	Elementary	3	3.34 (--)[a]
	High School	5	3.27 (.36)
SUS	Unified	5	3.35 (.49)
	Elementary	3	2.59 (--)[a]
	High School	5	3.29 (.37)

Note. TE = team effectiveness; IE = improvement efforts; SCS = state consultant services; ACC = accountability; and SUS = sustainability.

[a] A standard deviation value could not be calculated due to the number of cases that were actually included in the weighted analysis.